

A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION

Drama

THE QUARTERLY
THEATRE REVIEW

EDITED BY IVOR BROWN

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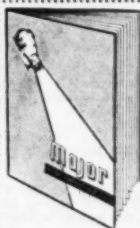
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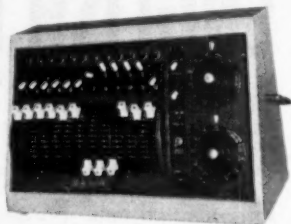
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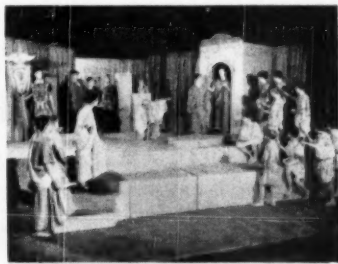
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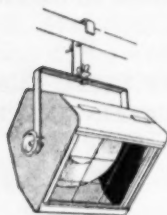
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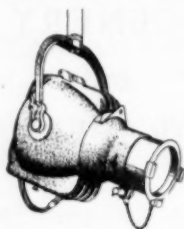
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AUTUMN 1959

NUMBER 54

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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



THE INSERTED THEATRE

A NEW pattern of theatre-building is being developed. There are plans for an additional West End Theatre, to be called the Prince Charles, which will be part of a block of business premises to the north of Leicester Square. The same idea has been put forward in the reconstruction of the demolished Stoll Theatre in Aldwych. These playhouses will be small, but they should be able to pay their way with this kind of integration among offices and consequent sharing of overhead and underfoot charges.

An example of the Inserted Theatre had already been set by the City of Manchester's Central Library. Moreover, Bernard Miles by squeezing his Mermaid Theatre into a slice of Puddle Dock in Blackfriars has also provided a useful (and immediately successful) specimen of the theatre that has found and used a niche instead of requiring a spacious and expensive site.

There were doubters who thought that the Mermaid would not appeal. It was argued that the City of London workers, for whom it was designed to cater, only want to escape from the E.C. area with the greatest possible speed. Watch them scrambling for their trains! The theatre must be something 'Up West' for them, something special, not a humble neighbour. And the West would certainly not go East for its entertainment. Such were the fears of some.

But this has not happened. The City folk have been steady patrons and the West has gone East to the Mermaid. The choice of play has no doubt helped that. The selection of a 'period' romp was wise. A new theatre must establish itself rapidly and it would be foolish to acquire an early reputation for housing only the snarls of the angry or the moanings of the Higher Gloom. Bernard Miles can 'raise his sights' later on. Meanwhile he has made friends and gained goodwill.

A valuable point is being made by theatres of this kind. They make playgoing a part of normal life and the day's routine, and not something 'posh', something specially sited in a special Pleasure Zone, something for Saturday Night.

There should always be two kinds of theatre. In one class let there be grandeur by all means. Nobody would like a National Theatre to be meanly housed and, if a city chooses to spend freely on the finest, as Coventry did, good luck to it. But there is abundant need also for the playhouse which, like the public house, the shops and the cinema, is accepted as normal to the street. It need not be a mimic palace; it need not be encrusted with gilt, as of old, or a glazier's delight, as at Coventry. One can still like the old Victorian theatres with their fantastic decoration, but they belonged to a different attitude and stressed the notion of escape into a never-never-land. One side of play-acting will always be escapist and rococo homes best suit the romantic theatre.

But there is the other kind of theatre in which the 'make-believe' of acting is not devoted only to beautiful nonsense or to the pursuit of easy laughter. It seeks to mingle 'make-think' with 'make-believe' and to show that playgoing can be the pleasant and stimulating partner of work-going in customary surroundings.

The Inserted Theatre, whether among docks or desks, may be minor in size but is major in importance. It is 'civic' with a small 'c'. But it stresses the fact that drama can be an everyday part of everybody's business and not only a treat for which special arrangements must be made, or somewhere to take Aunt Edna when she comes for a visit. It is excellent that she should be taken to a play; it is excellent also, that there should be theatres which Aunt Edna might not recognise as such.

Left: PHYLLIS CALVERT and SIR RALPH RICHARDSON in 'The Compliant Lover' by Graham Greene at the Globe Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

THE late Spring and early Summer of 1959 were anything but dull in the London theatre. Yet perhaps the most inspiring event of the period has been the appearance of two new theatres. We may consider the Queen's Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue as new, for since a bomb destroyed it in 1940 it has remained a dark and silent shell. Now, it has aimed not unsuccessfully at getting the best of both worlds—contemporary if not precisely modern outside, and in the auditorium warm and friendly in the Edwardian mode, all gilt and coolly pretty colours.

Who better to open the new stage than Sir John Gielgud? Our finest Shakespearian actor played his first West End Hamlet here thirty years ago, and more than twenty years ago ran in this theatre the finest season of assorted classics seen on English boards this century. Now, on a stage all crimson from footlights to flies, his anxious brow and questing nose rearing out of a sedate dinner-jacket, he held packed houses in electric silence with a solitary and rich series of extracts from Shakespeare, rising to a peak of mastery in a long patchwork from *Richard II*. This was hardly a play in performance, but for all its good things the theatre has scarcely equalled it for intensity of beauty and understanding.

The other new theatre is of course Bernard Miles's venture on the river bank at Blackfriars, the Mermaid. Whipping up money from here and there Mr. Miles has achieved a little miracle. His auditorium is anything but Edwardian. His seats are uncommonly roomy, and the long rake descends evenly to the open stage—a bait for ingenuity—but I cannot quite share the management's pleasure in their bare brick walls; this is carrying too far the admirable dodge of making

a virtue of necessity. An extremely interesting programme of future productions is announced, and the opening entertainment has been highly successful. The reader who detects a note of reserve in that comment will not be wide of the mark. *Lock up your Daughters*, an eighteenth-century romp adapted from Fielding's *Rape upon Rape*, fitted up with intermittently witty songs to brightly eclectic music by Laurie Johnson, is fun; but it undeniably resembles not so much the start of an important theatrical venture as an end-of-term jollification.

The bouncing good humour of the performance fitted the piece admirably. I thought enviously of it when watching in particular, Alan Melville's *Change of Tune* (Strand), first an Italian play, but achieving real—and enormous—success in a French adaptation as *L'heure éblouissante*; and it is still set in France. Mr. Melville has taken this featherweight joke of a dear little wife with a silly husband, of a rakish count and a small-town brothel, and laboriously underlined the obvious. His producer, Vida Hope, carried on the bad work, and his cast, or at least its male members, completed the ruin of a charming bit of nonsense with a fearful battery of nods and winks and digs in the ribs. Geraldine McEwan, sweetly husky as the little wife, and Dilys Laye as the light lady with whom she changes place, at least avoided this mistake, and played with some delicacy.

Precisely the same is true of Vivien Leigh in *Look after Lulu!* (Royal Court Theatre). Indeed for my money Miss Leigh, though she looked extremely pretty, underplayed to the point of letting the champagne go flat. But then she was fighting fearful odds. *Look after Lulu!* is an adaptation by none other than Noël Coward of Feydeau's *Occupe-*



'LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTERS' (adapted by Bernard Miles from Fielding's 'Rape upon Rape') at the Mermaid Theatre. Photograph by Michael Boys.

toi d'Amélie. 'Adaptation' in this case means that Mr. Coward has stuck to the original fairly closely, but cut and trimmed and pasted on reworkings of many of his own once excellent jokes. Young Mr. Tony Richardson, who seems, what with the Stratford *Othello* and *Orpheus Descending*, to be going through a bad patch, produced the piece at a lumbering trot, so that the split-second precision of the original, which builds up a cumulative frenzy, was completely lost. And with two exceptions the distinguished male members of the cast (among them Anthony Quayle and George Devine) bellowed and stamped their way through the play as though they were all dogged Englishmen trying to make a foreigner understand some local taboo. The two exceptions were Max Adrian, who couldn't make much of the rather

colourless part of an ogling Russian prince, but made that little neatly; and Michael Bates, who rescued the third act with a charming sketch of a susceptible policeman. Once again, I suppose, we must lament the absence of a proper farcical tradition—at least of a farcical tradition flexible enough to encompass more than horse-play. On that modest level, of course, we do pretty well, as at the Whitehall or in a cheerful nonsense called *Caught Napping* (Piccadilly Theatre), in which, under Anthony Sharpe's direction, the idiot comings and goings of a cast of mostly straight actors were admirably timed, and worked up to a splendid sequence in which an elderly General's deaf wife was hurtled round the stage in a wheelbarrow with an enormous carrot stuffed in her mouth. If we can do it here, why can we not do it in Pinero or Feydeau

or those admittedly more tricky reaches where farce and comedy blend—those reaches where, in case you think them trivial, Molière manoeuvred with such delight?

One answer, I suppose, lies in the fact that we and the Americans have drifted into the dismal shallows of the light comedies. These are the plays which make no demands upon anybody—which is why they are so popular with aimless playgoers and, I am afraid, with amateur companies. Somewhere—usually in a sticky passage soon after the beginning of the third act, they have a little something to say about human nature, but always slide away again as quickly as possible into the frivolous mechanics of the plot. David Horne wrote, produced and played the leading role in *The Prodigal Wife* (Winter Garden), a burden which proved too great for him and his amiable play about the unsettling results, even in a relatively prosperous family, of a win in the pools. Wynyard Browne scored a near miss with *The Ring of Truth* (Savoy Theatre). Three strands were rather too roughly interwoven—the scientist husband who believes in reasoning things out and is of course confounded (David Tomlinson); the intuitive, not to say superstitious, wife who amply contributes to the disaster she foresees (Margaret Johnston); and the devious stupidity of officialdom as represented by the Police (John Slater, almost too saturninely strong for the play, and Brian Wilde, benignly inane—two excellent performances).

From an American original Rodney Ackland constructed in *Farewell, Farewell Eugene* (Garrick Theatre), a sentimental farce in which a silly old thing (Margaret Rutherford in full fig) proved after all to have more sense than her sensible sister (Peggy Mount at full blast). These two actresses contributed first-rate standard performances; more interesting, more touching, was Avril Elgar's study of a plain Jane with courage. Her diffident defiance shone

through the period trimmings and the junketing.

Wholly American, but played à l'anglaise, *The Pleasure of his Company* (Haymarket), and *Once More, With Feeling* (New Theatre), demonstrated rather interestingly the difference between a touch of style and no style at all. Not that one can really speak of 'a touch of style' in connection with any play in which Coral Browne appears. As the ex-wife of an international playboy, now placidly married to a dull San Franciscan and unwillingly confronted with her ebullient ex-husband, she deploys with absolute sureness of touch and unshaken sable majesty an infinity of unserious emotion in a play which was often almost witty, with Nigel Patrick, as the playboy whose company was so mixed a pleasure, unfailingly jolly. *Once More, With Feeling* presented John Neville to the London stage in a non-costume part for the first time; it was not a happy occasion. As a temperamental conductor Mr. Neville resembled rather a petulant sixth-former, and offered the least funny parody of a musician that can be imagined. True, the piece was shoddily written, so that Dorothy Tutin seemed sadly out of place as the maestro's reluctantly loyal wife; but the tough professionalism of Martin Miller as a shameless impresario showed how something might have been made of this poor stuff.

Coming into the straight, so to speak, we were offered two more American plays with New York success behind them. Morton Wishengrad's *The Rope Dancers* (Arts Theatre) proved, however, to be a heavy-handed period piece, its theme trailing after *Little Eyolf*, about what a deranged mind supposes to be the consequences of lust—in this case a child with six fingers to its hand. Hugh Burden sustained an ineffective husband; Joan Miller rampaged as the tortured wife. *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (Adelphi Theatre), was the first play by a coloured writer to be presented on Broadway; the



VIVIEN LEIGH and MAX ADRIAN in 'Look after Lulu' at the Royal Court Theatre. Photograph by David Sim.

New York Critics' Circle, in a sudden rush of liberalism to the head, awarded her piece a prize as the best play of the year. It may well have been so; but in that case the New York theatre has nothing to crow about. This is a warm-hearted little piece about a Negro family in Chicago dominated by Mama, in which her son has given up, her daughter-in-law suffers nobly, and her daughter conceals a great heart behind a mask of pert juvenility. Sooner or later, we know, the son is going to rise belatedly to manhood. No harm in that; but unfortunately he does so simply in accordance with the demands of the plot, not as a result of any growth of character. Earle Hyman did wonders in staving off the monotony inherent in this fellow's noisy self-pity, and in mitigating the sentimentality imposed on the play by its otherwise sensitive producer, Lloyd Richards. But Juanita

Moore as Mama, though entirely sympathetic, lacked grandeur for the big moments.

Now little by little the altitude rises. No towering theatrical peaks enliven the route as did, for example, *Brand* earlier in the year, yet there were moments of splendour among the foothills. None of these was contributed by the classics, of which we have seen two.

The London visit of the Malmö Municipal Theatre under its celebrated director Ingmar Bergman was, or should have been, something of an occasion; was, indeed, since this provided an evening of such stunning tedium as can seldom have been equalled and never surpassed. A Swedish translation of Goethe's original version of *Faust* did not to begin with promise much dramatic excitement. Mr. Bergman's production, against a background variously lit with unfortu-

nate electric shades and among a row of arches stretching across the stage, was statuesque to the point of inertia, and projected by acting of a very modest order. The language may or may not have been beautiful and finely spoken, but sounded gritty and inexpressive to these English ears. The Old Vic's version of *The Cenci* was, at least, successful in a negative way. It did not bore, but it made clear why this is not, in fact, a great neo-Elizabethan tragedy. Shelley's use of language was most impressive when it was least poetical; his conception of character, unfortunately, was primitive and fragmentary. The actors had no hope, it soon became clear, of making coherent, developing beings out of these changeable puppets; but Beatrice gave Barbara Jefford the chance to take another step forward, in the blend of power and pathos she brought to this confused and confusing girl, while Hugh Griffith in default of sense supplied sensation in plenty, with rolling eye and lashing tongue, as the monstrous Count.

The classics provided their own remote inspiration for the two most remarkable American imports. Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending* (Royal Court Theatre), a reworking of a quite early play, followed legend in that the wandering musician, in this case a banjo-boy from the Mississippi Delta (though played by Gary Cockrell as a lithe but mentally deficient fugitive from *West Side Story*), was destroyed by the malice of the women whose days he had enlivened. Set in a Southern general store, plentifully stocked with disease and frustration, the piece is slow, atmospheric and from time to time uneasily poetic; its production, by Tony Richardson, underlined the play's weakness, and illustrated this director's failing—a tendency to allow slack skeins of fuzziness to droop from one nodal point of the action to another. And the latest in Mr. Williams's long line of hard-pressed middle-aged women was played with dignity, fire and understanding by the Italian

actress Isa Miranda, but in very imperfect English.

Most impressive of all this quarter's performances, I have no doubt, was that of the American Zero Mostel as Leopold Bloom in the Marjorie Barentin-Burgess Meredith slice from James Joyce, *Ulysses in Nighttown*, brought with commendable enterprise to the Arts Theatre. The adaptation is marred by an unwillingness to trust in Joyce's virtuoso use of language, and a too laborious effort to embody everything in action, using mime and near-ballet. Alan Badel was a too mature Dedalus, perhaps, but he understood very well this angry young man with the soft heart and the cruelty that goes with that organ. Mr. Mostel, though properly speaking too big for Bloom, caught every aspect of aspiration, weakness, defiant clowning in the little Jewish dreamer. His ragged moustache and bulging hyperthyroid eyes shivered through the squalor like the outward emblems of a hermit crab without a home.

The younger English theatre was quite strongly represented by three contributions—one of them from amateurs, the Cambridge University Actors, who even go so far as to write their own plays: Rae Jenkins's *Clair de Lune* (Arts Theatre), a Strindbergian-Genetic-Ionescan interlude in which domestic dullness is mitigated by a disturbing quasi-Christian overlay, with something to say about loneliness which Rachel Herbert and Clive Swift, under John Tydeman's direction, were quite equal to expressing—a remarkable achievement in so young a quartet. In *Deutsches Haus* (Arts Theatre) Richard Cottrell attempted something more difficult. Using highly naturalistic dialogue, his setting a bar used by national servicemen in Germany, he set out to portray one of those girls who, though undoubtedly capable of real feeling, in fact of a truly loving disposition, are driven by a combination of errors of judgment and adverse circumstances to become little better than apathetic

tarts. Here again insight was displayed which many an older dramatist might envy; and Margaret Drabble beautifully embodied the muted radiance which dulled into a tawdry sparkle. The

piece *The Rough and Ready Lot*, the last of the 59 Theatre Company's productions out at the Lyric, Hammersmith, would have been all the better cut down to television length. Here again was



JOAN PLOWRIGHT and GWEN NELSON in 'Roots' by Arnold Wesker at the Duke of York's Theatre. Photograph by David Sim.

young gentlemen, too, seemed perfectly at home, but then Englishmen always are when called upon to play stupid and vociferous louts.

Alun Owen has I believe written for television, and his more than promising

impassioned idealism at war with more or less humane expediency, wrapped up in an intermittently dramatic tale of soldiers of fortune in a late nineteenth-century South American republic. Cut and given a stronger performance than

Casper Wrede was able to win from a modestly able cast, this would I believe have proved immensely effective; there is a spring in Mr. Owen's dialogue which augurs well. Jack MacGowran took all his opportunities as an Irishman, all for a quiet life and compromise, and at last, after taking a comical bath and skirting nervously the disputes of his brothers-in-arms, left in possession of the field.

Another promising little play won more *réclame*—Arnold Wesker's *Roots* (Duke of York's). Mr. Wesker's first play, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, was a neat but not very remarkable exercise in the genre of Jewish family drama. Here he daringly and to my mind quite successfully sets about filling the stage with the inarticulate—farm workers and their womenfolk in darkest Norfolk. Mr. Wesker's dialogue rang true, and was all the same never dull except in so far as John Dexter's laborious production brought it to a halt. Into this rural stagnation Mr. Wesker throws a girl who has escaped for a few exciting months with a coffee-bar Hamlet in London. His play of ideas dazzles her; she is determined that her family shall wake up. Then suddenly she sees that she has not really woken up herself, but is merely parroting her lover; and as suddenly, when she realises that she has lost him, finds that her own mind is working after all. What better part for Joan Plowright? Her chubby earnestness, upon which cheerfulness keeps breaking in, brightens the stage; her exasperation is clearly the bitter fruit of love; her sense of failure just, with perceptive judgment, escapes being mere sulks. Her little impromptu dance, by which she tries to persuade her kitchen-bound mother of the virtues of real music, is wholly charming, though not for me quite the moment of revelation it has been for some.

And last, *The Complaisant Lover* (Globe). Certainly not least; yet is it I wonder the quality of the piece or a certain awe of Graham Greene that has prevented me from bundling this in

with the light comedies? Mr. Greene's entertainment has something of the air of a play by N. C. Hunter posthumously worked over by Frederick Lonsdale, and given a farcial interlude which Feydeau would not have despised. It is not bitter; it is devoid of even a whiff of hellfire; in so far as it poses a moral exercise it shrugs the problem aside. The bored though not unloving middle-aged, middle-class wife is a very real feature of society, and here Mr. Greene has brushed her lightly in—and brushed in lightly too the problems, the pain which overcome all concerned when she takes a lover. He has made his lover too a not unreal figure—the quiet man of good nature and strong sexual appeal who finds himself condemned by his basic indifference to consoling a whole string of such women. Paul Scofield plays him with a fine sense of the fundamental apathy beneath the good-natured mask. Phyllis Calvert makes the wife—the least happily written role—at any rate a real woman, if not quite the right one by a hair-breadth of sophistication. As the husband Sir Ralph Richardson not only sketches a brilliant near-caricature of a decent dull dentist, but as usual when appearing in anything less than a masterpiece at one point takes the play by the scruff of the neck, dwarfs it, and wrings from its remains a morsel of sad truth: in this case the moment occurs when the poor fellow realises that something quite inconceivable has happened—his wife, an established part of his life, of himself, is not the nice contented woman he had supposed, but a nice discontented woman, and to remedy this state of affairs, she has, of all things, taken a lover. To watch Sir Ralph's crumpling was to feel not just pity, but sympathy for the deeply stupid. No need to describe Sir Ralph's rounded eyes and quivering mouth, his sudden contraction, his unembarrassing tears. By the triumph of an actor's art he had given us not a neatly turned moment of pathos but a poised instant of understanding.

RABBITS ALIVE-O!

By BASIL DEAN

REAL live rabbits scampering about the stage of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in my production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1924? They must have been hard put to it then to support themselves in such surroundings, for this was no verdant Warwickshire glade but a craggy Athenian landscape without noticeable pasturage, although there were plenty of acting levels for the human performers. Puzzled as to the origin of this legend mentioned by Mr. Ivor Brown in his article in the Summer number of *DRAMA*, I have been searching the files of newspaper cuttings but can find no mention of these animals, an obvious titbit for a paragraph writer.

However, since the practical mind, accustomed to organising detail into working pattern, should bear fairer witness, I referred the matter to W. L. Abingdon, who was stage director of Drury Lane at the time, to see whether he would corroborate my own recollection, and perhaps also scotch that other legend, re-appearing recently in print* that the performance lasted for four hours. His matter-of-fact replies are difficult to refute. 'The curtain rose at 8 p.m. and fell just before 11.10 p.m., thus avoiding overtime, which Sir Alfred Butt would never have permitted. In those days it was customary to allow ten minutes' grace after a three hours' performance before paying extra rates.' On rabbits: 'I ought to know because I should have been responsible for the damned things. They would have run all over the place.' Here I might add that those that escaped his ferreting would certainly have come to a messy end among the traps and hydraulic machinery that were put to full use in the production.

* Norman Marshall's *The Producer and the Play*.

My vow never to employ live animals of any sort in any of my productions sprang from an unfortunate incident which occurred during my time as a young actor with Miss Horniman's Company. I was playing Jasper in a Christmas production of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Esmé Percy as Ralph arrived on the scene on the first night mounted on a large white pony. The animal was so excited by this honour that it gave me a shower bath before Esmé had time to utter a word. Later, that odoriferous justification was admittedly replaced by more aesthetic reasoning; but the vow has never been broken, even though a theatre's black cat once came near to ruining one of the Reandean first nights by seating itself in the footlights during an emotional scene and proceeding to wash itself, presumably in protest at my previous neglect . . . It is a foolish practice anyway, for these 'performers' invariably attract the attention of the audience far beyond their merits.

If there were any truth in the rabbit legend—and there is not—it could only have been due to a sudden aberration on my part, a form of psychosis if you prefer, caused by my acute awareness of the financial risk I was running in daring to substitute a production of *The Dream* for the usual Christmas pantomime at this national shrine of the English Stage: doing so, be it noted, in the teeth of fierce and protracted opposition from my Board of Directors. When I first proposed it they nearly had hysterics. Drury Lane without its usual pantomime? Unthinkable! In vain I argued, somewhat Jesuitically, that *The Dream* was in itself a pantomime, and that I intended to produce it as such; it was still Shakespeare, all very well for a few farewell performances by some famous actor, but Drury Lane

had not ventured upon a Shakespearian production of its own for forty years. I had my way, but at the cost of my resignation as managing director. We were left with only five weeks and three days in which to cast, mount and rehearse the production. Meanwhile, Alfred Butt was walking about with my resignation in his pocket, congratulating himself no doubt that he was well rid of his 'troublesome prelate'. Alas! it meant the banishment beyond recall of all my hopes and plans for the old theatre.

Those plans were further advanced than my directors were ever to know. They included a star revival of *The School for Scandal*. Cyril Maude was to be the Sir Peter, Fay Compton the Lady Teazle and Henry Ainley the Joseph Surface. The play was to be done in a manner as close to its original production at the theatre in 1777 as research and modern requirements would permit us, with formal settings, the 'front' scenes closed in by liveried servants of the theatre working the flats in grooves and the stage lighted by candelabra. Stale beer nowadays, but frothy stuff then! (We did something like it later on in America on a University tour with O. P. Heggie playing Sir Peter Teazle. Harris's designs for it are still in my possession.)

Our production of *The Dream* moved some distance away both from conventional staging and interpretation, although innovation did not reach out so far as Granville-Barker's gilded fairies. (It must have been the First World War which halted the spread of Barker's Shakespearian influence in the immediate post-war years.)

Harris designed the play in the eighteenth century classical tradition, replacing conventional wings by hanging draperies of great height, painted impressionistically with dyes. There was innovation, too, in the treatment of Theseus' Palace, which was painted on gauze and back lighted for the final entrance of the fairies, reminding Drury Lane's Christmas audiences of

the transformation scenes to which they were addicted. Some of the critics disliked what they called the futuristic tendency of the scenery, notably James Agate, who complained that Titania's bower was too bare. Another point of departure lay in the treatment of Helena and Hermia and their lovers—a quartette beautifully orchestrated by Edith Evans, Athene Seyler, Leon Quartermaine and Frank Vosper—as light comedy parts in contrast to the heavy Shakespearian romanticism then current.

Criticism of the current zest for experiment in new ways of staging Shakespeare's plays—what Ivor Brown once most aptly termed 'fantastication'—overlooks the probability that if the dramatist were alive to-day he would take full advantage of the latest production and lighting techniques. It is somewhat pedantic to claim superior virtue for the presentation of Shakespeare's plays solely in terms of the stage limitations of his day. It reminds me of an argument that I have often heard raised across the dinner table: Would Irving be regarded as a great actor if he were alive to-day? The question is superfluous. All great actors instinctively express themselves with the technique and in the style of the times in which they live, improving them, advancing them, dominating them, no doubt, yet still reflecting them. So Irving, with his magnetic personality, would have been pre-eminent to-day.

What matters in Shakespearian performance is to ensure that the poetry and the intention of the works are fully brought home and made alive. As to whether modern experimentation helps or hinders the achievement of this result is a matter for the dramatic critics.

(Ivor Brown writes: 'I apologize to Basil Dean for having foisted non-existent coney on his Drury Lane "*Dream*", and thank him most warmly for his very entertaining as well as informative reply.'))

PLAYHOUSE, ROUGH HOUSE

By IVOR BROWN

THIS article is not concerned with the Tudor gentry who paid extra for seats at the side of the stage in order, as Thomas Dekker said, 'to mew at passionate speeches and blare at merry, find fault with the music, whew at the children's action, smoke, spit, and whistle at the songs'. Nor am I thinking of political demonstrations, price riots, or booing in the gallery. I am writing about what happens to writers, especially the writers of plays.

I was reminded of this subject by reading Henry Sherek's anecdotal autobiography.* During his energetic and ebullient career Sherek has been everything from agent to an elephant to a manager for T. S. Eliot. He has staged Shaw and Bridie as well as successfully serving the industries of circus and cabaret. He enjoys life, he likes making jokes—scarcely a paragraph lacks its 'crack'. Some of his cracks crackle: others fizzle. But nobody can be droll for 238 pages without sometimes dwindling to facetiousness.

To students of the theatre and to intending dramatists there is much interest in managerial records of this kind, not least because they show what happens to texts before and after production. We live in the age of 'the rewrite man' and naturally quite a number of people think that they can teach an author his business. Under American influence, publishers increasingly employ 'editors' to knock books into, or out of, shape. But in that case there is only one editor and he is supposed to be a specialist. In the majority of instances he probably does more good than harm, especially if he remedies the appalling errors of grammar and

syntax to be found in most scripts, especially of fiction.

In journalism the sub-editor, who trims and amends articles, is particularly important because of the strict conditions of space and content amid which journalism is produced. He must check facts, spot and remove possible libels, cut for length, and supply the right caption. He may or may not do it well. Most reporters will tell you that most sub-editors are ignorant maniacs. Most sub-editors will tell you that most reporters are careless, slovenly, prolix incompetents who are puffed up with vanity, because in the journalism of to-day they get their names at the top of their pieces, some of which are mere copies of 'hand-outs' from Public Relations Officers. The sub-editor, who may have saved an article or report from boring as well as blundering, remains anonymous.

The habit of play-doctoring has grown enormously in recent years. Sherek quotes George Kaufman, the American dramatist, as saying that plays are not written, but rewritten, and adds 'I have found that American authors are more aware of this than their British confrères'. He does not dispute Kaufman's fact and he obviously approves of the principle that a dramatist, even one of approved standing and with many successes behind him, should be told to rub it out and start again. He relates how Benn Levy, after writing and producing a play called *Return to Tyassi* refused to make alterations suggested by Sherek as manager. It is true that the play had a short life, but it is not at all certain that the play would have been any more successful if Benn Levy had altered his script according to managerial advice.

The trouble in the theatre, especially since play-doctoring became fashion-

* *Not in Front of the Children* by Henry Sherek. Heinemann. 21s.

able, is that there is not one doctor but as many as gathered round the dying Dubedat and failed to prevent his demise. There is the manager, there is the producer, and there are the leading players. Even the author's agent may have his own ideas. The manager claims his experience of 'what goes' if he is not a new arrival and he may start to throw his weight about even if he is a tyro working with his own or somebody else's capital. The producer also has his own ideas as to improvements. The leading players may see the play simply as it affects their parts and want those parts built up while others are diminished or even demolished. So the hurly-burly begins, the tempers rise, and the playhouse becomes, before and during rehearsal, a somewhat rough house.

If the author is in a strong position by reason of past achievements, he can stand his ground. If he is someone delighted to have his play accepted and desperately anxious to see it produced, he can easily be pushed about so that he is driven to omit or rewrite what he believes to be essential. This rewriting may go on not only before the play goes into rehearsal, but during rehearsal and even while the play is on tour before a West End showing. With advice, possibly conflicting, from several quarters and in a whirl of hurried revision, the dramatist is kept cutting and darning the original cloth until he can hardly recognise his own work. I know that to be no exaggeration of what does occur and I know of one instance where a play was, in my belief, ruined in the process and had a far shorter run than it might have had if left alone.

Of course it sometimes happens that plays are much improved by doctoring; but the amount of surgery and injection now fashionable is so extensive and so constant that what might be a helpful treatment is becoming a menace. It is forgotten that the drama, both commercial and experimental, has done well without all this outside therapy in the past. The Committee of the Stage

Society, whose admirable record is related in this number of *DRAMA* by Clifford Bax, himself both playwright and for many years Chairman of that Society, did not, I fancy, set about rewriting all the many excellent plays which they sponsored. Some of these, no doubt, could have been improved. Could not more have been seriously harmed?

The present reaction of managements to the receipt of a likely script is immediately to ask the question 'What can we do with it?' There are so many people who feel they should have been authors themselves and therefore itch to improve other people's work, complacently confident that they know best. But the result is likely to be more chaotic than curative. When you get a group of people living with a play they are so eager to be ingenious themselves that they forget the likely audience in the very process of seeking to capture it. Because they are so close to it, they take for granted points that will seem obscure to the public or cut passages essential to the story because they already know the story so well themselves.

I do not see what the dramatist can do about this unless, as I said, he is one whose work is greatly desired on account of past successes. But it may be a point for the League of Dramatists to consider. In the meantime I think it might be well for managers, in their own interests and not merely in decency to authors, to approach play-doctoring with more modesty and caution. I have expressed elsewhere my view that every critic of the arts should have written in his mind, if not upon a card on his desk, the notable observation of Oliver Cromwell to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland:

I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.

If this advice be properly applicable to the critical profession, it should apply no less in the playhouse to managers, producers, actors and agents who set out to teach the writer how to write.

THE STAGE SOCIETY'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

By CLIFFORD BAX

To mark the Sixtieth Anniversary of the founding of the Stage Society we print the following extracts from an outline of the Society's history from 1899 to 1929, which Mr. Bax (Chairman of the Society for many years) originally wrote in the form of six programme notes.

The Ibsen-Shaw Stratum, 1899-1903

In July, 1899, three months after the outbreak of the Boer War, about fifty people, meeting at a house in Red Lion Square, founded the Stage Society. Their purpose was to present stimulating but unmarketable plays on Sunday evenings. No theatre, they assumed, would be open on a Sunday, so they arranged to meet in large studios and do their plays with costume but without scenery. The available studios, however, were not so large as they had expected, and in some perturbation they dashed about London in their hansoms, inspecting picture galleries, circuses, and even skating-rinks. All these places, it seems, were owned by godly men who frowned upon the 'intellectual observance of the Sabbath', and it was only when the Royalty Theatre defied convention that James Welch was able to produce the Society's first play—*You Never Can Tell*.

During the first four years the Society produced, together with other plays, four by Ibsen, two by Hauptmann, one by the promising playwright Somerset Maugham, and five by Bernard Shaw—*You Never Can Tell*, *Candida*, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, and *The Admirable Bashville*. So many managers fought shy of lending their theatres for Mrs. Warren that no home could be found for it until three days before the performance.

Though not afraid of grim fare,

members had their moments of levity. The programme of *Bashville* observed that 'members wishing to leave at the beginning of the performance are requested to do so as unobtrusively as possible'. At the Dinner in 1904 Mr. Shaw said: 'I do not think that I should have had the courage (to turn from the criticism to the writing of plays) if it had not been for the hope of some theatre in which my plays could be performed', and it is to the lasting credit of the Society's first members that they created a theatre for our most eminent playwright.

From Brieux to Bennett, 1904-1909

The second period was marked by the appearance of Granville-Barker on the Management Committee, by a fierce passion for the works of Brieux—four being produced within a short time—and by the mysterious ceremony of Incorporation, which the Chairman explained somehow safeguarded its members from the disaster that would follow if all the persons on the Committee were simultaneously to go out of their minds. Even this assurance seems not to have brought a downpour of guineas, for after they had dined in 1905, Mr. Shaw observed: 'The health of the Stage Society, which you have drunk so enthusiastically is, as usual, in a very precarious condition . . . It is not our business to flourish, our business is always to be a forlorn hope'. It may be presumed therefore, that he no longer contributed to the programme (except

for *Man and Superman* none of his plays had been produced for a long time), lest the Society might become prosperous and, as the Frenchman said, 'sit back and bloat'. No doubt it was from this period that the Committee became infected by the notion that a considerable play must be tinged with sociological doctrines, a malady from which it did not soon recover.

In 1906 they produced Ibsen's *Lady Inger of Ostråt*, adding in the programme a defensive note to the effect that though it was a very bad play, sinking to the criminal depths of soliloquy, no doubt the audience would welcome even a bad play by the Master. At the same time they stated, a little complacently, that they could not find any new English plays that were worth presenting. In 1907, however, the Committee, having buried Ibsen, officiated at the baptism as playwrights of Granville-Barker, Charles McEvoy and St. John Hankin. A year later it must have felt that it stood on the verge of another period as glorious as the First or Shavian Age. It had discovered Arnold Bennett, producing in 1908 *Cupid and Commonsense*, and in 1909 *What the Public Wants*.

The Halcyon Years, 1910-1914

By 1910 the Society, despite its good intentions, had become surprisingly prosperous. It had 1517 members upon its books and £1,554 in its bank. Moreover, both 'Mr.' Barrie and Mr. Shaw were upon its Council, though the former seems not to have attended corporeally at any meeting. The Council, having danced for twelve years, now vociferously demanded the head of the Censor. In 1911 it drew up a Petition which was signed by sixty dramatists (among whom, somewhat oddly, was Mr. H. G. Wells) and by a hundred other persons of distinction. In due time the Petition was laid before the King, but the announcement of this fact is the last reference to the matter which appears in the Society's archives.

Now too the Society was taking a

fatherly pride in the success of its progeny. The Ordinary Person was supporting a valiant effort made by Charles Frohmann to establish a Repertory Theatre in the West End, the newly-formed Repertories in Birmingham, Dublin, Manchester, Glasgow and Liverpool, together with several play societies, including the Play-Actors and the Pioneer Players. In 1912 the New York Stage Society was formed in frank imitation of the Stage Society, which, indeed, may have suffered to some extent from the offspring over whom it was then so jubilant, for after 1910 the membership showed a gradual decline. It was still an enterprising body, and at the Dinner in 1913 Madame Pavlova herself presided.

The plays of this period to which a Baedeker of the drama might affix his star were perhaps *The Cherry Orchard* (Tchekov), *Hindle Wakes* (Stanley Houghton), *Countess Mizzie* and *The Green Cockatoo* (Schnitzler), *Elizabeth Cooper* (George Moore)—in which an actress named Edith Evans appeared—and *Uncle Vanya* (Tchekov). John Masefield, too, fresh from the staggering success of *The Everlasting Mercy*, entered the Society's list of playwrights with his neo-Shavian *Pompey the Great*. The production of a second play by Tchekov was braver than many realised, for some members were so bored and bewildered by *The Cherry Orchard* that they walked out before it ended. Three months after *Uncle Vanya* Europe was at war.

The Old Masters, 1915-1919

At first people lost interest in the arts, and it was only when the war became chronic that, with a natural reaction, they began to throng the theatres. These symptoms are reflected in the Society's story. Early in 1915 more than 200 members resigned. In 1916, on the contrary, it had a record accession of new members. The Council, plainly, was in an experimental mood for during this period they produced, in addition to the work of the Old Masters, *Wanderers*, the first of the series

of plays by C. K. Munro which they were destined to sponsor; *Youth* by Miles Malleson; *Augustus Does His Bit*, with which Mr. Shaw returned to the fold, and *Good Friday* by John Masefield, suggesting by the choice of a verse-play that they had overcome a temperamental tendency to ignore poetic drama. In view of the plays by Munro and Malleson it was surprising that the Council should have observed at the General Meeting in 1917 that 'the encouragement of young and unknown dramatists is another "plank" in the Society's original scaffold which may now possibly be dispensed with'. At least one person heard this pronouncement with an unhappy suspicion that the Society was beginning to fossilize. However, in 1919 it seems to have suffered a change of heart, for it then produced *The Spirit of Parsifal* Robinson by Harold Rubinstein.

This abrupt desertion of the young and unknown dramatists may really have resulted from the exciting discovery that audiences were ready to welcome with enthusiasm a revival of old English plays. These revivals, indeed, form the outstanding feature of the period. Soon after the outbreak of War, the Society appropriately produced *The Recruiting Officer*; in 1916 *The Double Dealer*; in 1917 *Love for Love*; in 1918 *The Way of the World*, and in 1919 *The Provok'd Wife*. Seeing that most people find difficulty in remembering, or even following, the plot of any play by Congreve, and that they find Farquhar's work comparatively simple, one is bewildered to find the Council reporting that 'the halting plunge which brought the Society to Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* was followed by a refreshing dive into the clear waters of Congreve.'

Ancients versus Moderns, 1920-1925

Coming of age in 1920, the Society found that it had presented a hundred plays. Rather surprisingly, the Council now regarded itself as combating 'that

dismal succession of "social" dramas, fruit of a fatal misunderstanding of Ibsen, which set the English theatre back for more than twenty years'. Still, an old organisation must either change or perish, and the Council, taunting 'those solemn individuals who from time to time declare that the Society's work is ended', was obviously in fighting trim.

In the same year the Stage Society gave birth to the Phoenix Society which, of course, presented only Elizabethan and Restoration plays. It soon became remarkably popular. Many members, unable to subscribe to both societies, transferred their support to the new venture. There is a tinge of irony both in the fact that the Phoenix, at the hour of its highest glory, gave a *matinée* on behalf of its progenitor, and in the fact that two years later the Phoenix had expired and the Stage Society was still producing notable plays.

In 1919, the latter had undertaken a production of Herbert Trench's elaborate *Napoleon*, securing for the play a 'beautiful and ingenious' setting by Norman Wilkinson. In 1920, as if to show that it was still the advance-guard of the English theatre, it presented *From Morn to Midnight* by Georg Kaiser, thus giving London its earliest opportunity, after the war, of seeing an up-to-date German play, and (with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*) the work, hitherto unknown in England, of Pirandello. C. K. Munro continued to score in the cause of the Moderns, contributing *The Rumour*, *Progress*, and *At Mrs. Beam's*, in which our audience enjoyed a pleasure that is of necessity unusual, for good comedies being acceptable in the West End rarely needed the Stage Society's advocacy.

Indeed, the season of 1923-24 brought forward a programme of so high a quality that it might have silenced those unthinking persons who required of the Stage Society what no manager could achieve—the production of four consecutive successes. The plays chosen were *Progress* (Munro), *Masses*

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and *Men* (Toller), *The Pleasure Garden* (Beatrice Mayor), and *The Adding Machine* (Elmer Rice). Following these, in 1925, by *The Man with a Load of Mischief* (Ashley Dukes), the Society gave a lusty kick to those who had rashly said that life had gone out of it.

Years of Peril, 1926-1929

The Three Hundred Club, founded in 1923, and solely managed by Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth, had produced several interesting British plays. The most notable, perhaps, were *Prisoners of War* (James Ackrley), and *The Comedy of Good and Evil* (Richard Hughes). In 1926 the Three Hundred Club amalgamated with the Stage Society, and in that year produced two plays by D. H. Lawrence, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and *David*. The veteran society was undoubtedly in a bad way, for it depended for its revenue upon that small minority whose interest in the drama was not confined to the plays talked about at cocktail parties. It lost a good deal of support by sponsoring a number of works which few people could have thought anything but tedious and its position would have been desperate if Mrs. Whitworth had not organised, in 1927, a benefit matinée. In the same year the Society did something to recover its reputation by producing *Der Weibsteufel* (Schön-herr) and *The Great God Brown* (O'Neill). In 1928 it started brilliantly with *L'Amé en Peine* (J.-J. Bernard) and *Young Woodley* (John van Druten)—the latter being Mrs. Whitworth's contribution to the programme—but in producing the former, the first of the author's plays to be seen in London, it paid its usual price for pioneering.

The Society began its thirtieth season (1928-1929) with a drama which subsequently achieved a success that is probably unparalleled in the annals of the theatre—*Journey's End* (R. C. Sheriff): and the Three Hundred Club concluded it with *After All* (van Druten). On a July night in 1929, the Chairman, reviving an old memory, gave a Recep-

tion, to which every member of the Society was invited, in the magnificent mansion and garden of Miss Maud Allan.

The next season opened with a debt of about £1,000. The membership had fallen so low that the Council had to abandon the Monday matinées. The

situation then changed: the debt dwindled, the membership more than doubled. In bringing about this change (chiefly due to the enterprise of Mrs. Gwladys Wheeler), the Society had to make bricks without straw. Unhampered by debt it would obviously be much easier to do effective work.

Ending his 'miniature account' here, Mr. Bax says that whatever its shortcomings the Stage Society must figure conspicuously in any history of the British Theatre. The Society suspended its activities when war broke out in 1939, but it was hoped to resume them later on 'when the Ibsen and Shaw and Tchekov of a new age made their unheralded and unwelcomed appearance'.

FROM IMPROVISATION TO PLAYMAKING

By DOROTHEA ALEXANDER

PLAYMAKING might be called an adventure in drama. Great strides have been made in recent years in this field, but there is plenty of scope left for further experiment. One fact emerges already: although not everyone can become a writer, and even fewer are fitted to become playwrights, anybody can become a creative part of a playmaking group.

Playmaking has its roots in improvisation. For a considerable time improvisation has been practised in a great variety of individual ways. Since Stanislavski, it has become one of many teaching subjects, mostly for beginners, at our professional drama schools. Acting courses for amateurs usually include some form of improvisation in their syllabus. In a somewhat different way it is used in Method teaching. It has also been adapted to children's work and under the name of 'spontaneous drama' it is being taught in primary and secondary schools. In the professional theatre it is rarely used, and then only tentatively. There is a telling passage in Michael Redgrave's book

The Actor's Ways and Means; Joan Littlewood uses a similar approach at Theatre Workshop and last but not least we find some detailed accounts in the theoretical writings of Bertolt Brecht and in the production books of the Berliner Ensemble.

When we come to the extension of improvisation into actual playmaking, our present-day records become sparser. We know that a certain amount is being done in schools, in youth drama groups and rather less in the amateur theatre. We also know that by tacit consent good actors sometimes remake poorish plays in this fashion. Some sound radio comedy programmes are said to have been made in this way.

The *Commedia dell'Arte* companies certainly made their plays by acting them in improvisation. Their scenarios which have been preserved look much like those assembled in modern playmaking practice; that is, they contain the framework of actions, entrances, exits, business and by-play habitual to a certain actor in a certain part, and other items which will mean a lot to a com-

pany concerned, yet will appear merely as the bare bones to the uninitiated. To people trained in the practice of playmaking they suggest that the characters and the acting of the *Commedia* was a great deal more realistic than some stylised and mannered revivals have led us to believe; *dell'Arte* did not mean art.

Playmaking is a creative theatrical activity. It does not necessarily require particular literary talents or ambitions; but the players and their director must have lively imaginations, well developed powers to observe life within and around them, a true feeling for the theatre and the urge to create. As in any theatrical activity results can be produced in many ways; I can only speak of the approach I have found to be the most successful.

Playmaking requires a different attitude from other theatrical work. This is a kind of trust and humility towards the imagination and the creative faculties of the co-players. It is a feature of this work that characters develop by impact upon each other. Therefore, although an actor's personality and 'fighting spirit' will be an asset here as elsewhere, there is little scope for the selfish and purely exhibitionist actor or director. It is a group activity, yet the individual actor will find in it more than the task of recreation. By helping to create a new whole to which he is contributing a vital part he will discover a new kind of fulfilment. Uninhibited by lines, purely concerned with the thought and action of his character, of which words are but one manifestation, the actor is free to observe and hear the other players and to perceive at an early stage undercurrents which under different conditions might pass unnoticed. This results in teamwork of high standard.

In playmaking no script is used; if rehearsals are spaced out over long periods with many breaks a scenario is all that is required. As soon as a script exists further developments tend to be inhibited. Playmaking sessions or re-

hearsals are never dull, for no actor can afford to be mentally absent for any length of time. The slightest development between any two characters may affect his own part or even the plot as a whole. For only the initial conditions of a play are mutually agreed upon; if a plot is fully set in advance the play will turn out to be but a poor thing. There exists at rehearsals a general state of alertness, which is all too often lacking on other such occasions. It is this alertness which makes repetition and improvement possible. It is astonishing how strongly thoughts, actions and key words stick in the actors' minds. This is helped by a strong rhythm that imposes itself upon the plays, their scenes and even smaller units. Entrances, exits and endings acquire a kind of inevitability.

It becomes clear that this process of playmaking differs profoundly from the usual ways of the dramatist with whom the writing of a play becomes an individual and carefully planned godlike act, and future playwrights may well be influenced by the techniques of playmaking.

Plays made in improvisation may not have a great literary value, yet undoubtedly they will be theatre. The characters and their development will be clear and plausible. The dialogue will be broken up in a realistic way. When speeches of any length occur they will never go outside a character's range. Action and movement will be incorporated from the start and will have a much stronger function than in the conventional play. The themes and problems will be contemporary since they are taken from life rather than from stage and screen. Starting from realism it is possible to go to dream sequences, which can be fascinating.

In every way there will be a great deal of originality and little cliché. In shape such plays tend to be episodic; if no time limit is set they will be of epic character. If limitations are

applied by using Aristotelian rules a heightened dramatic content will be achieved, whether it be comedy or tragedy. Contained comedy, by the way, is here too by far the more difficult medium, though much natural comedy may occur within tragedy. It is difficult to assess the entertainment value of such plays at present but it is fair to say that the majority of audiences have often been much moved or amused, though some find in improvised plays a strong element of provocation. This is perhaps encouraging.

There is little doubt that playmaking will open a new field of activity and experiment for the amateur theatre which often finds itself short of plays to fit casting requirements. Groups like the Women's Institutes and the Townswomen's Guilds have great difficulty in discovering more than a certain number of plays of merit to perform, and youth groups spend much time trying to find plays which will really interest their members and be within their youthful experience. To all such groups playmaking will offer a new and satisfying experience. If they take it seriously enough to equip themselves with some basic training, without which this work cannot be well done, they will have a chance to contribute something to the theatre which will be the more valuable because they are real people, ordinary members of the communities they live in. Their view of life and people will be fresh and direct, their performances deeper and their words and movements more integrated.

It is significant that during the Conference for Youth Drama Festival Organisers held by the Guild of Drama Adjudicators it was suggested that among other new competitive categories 'Group Work and Playmaking' should be admitted to Youth Festivals. One may hope that a similar suggestion may be made for adult groups in the near future. Amateur drama and the theatre as a whole might benefit from such a step.

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STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, 1959

THIS was the centenary of Stratford Festival Seasons. To celebrate the hundreth occasion there was a notable list of visiting stars. Paul Robeson's Othello was a great box-office asset. He used his magnificent voice with fine effect in a presentation by Tony Richardson which had several faults of casting and production, but was notable for the speed of the early scenes and the astonishingly athletic, even acrobatic, energy of the revels and fights.

The direction of *All's Well that Ends Well* by Tyrone Guthrie, in Victorian costume, was at once a lark and a lyric. Contrary to the romantic opinion that Helena was a disgrace to her sex, Guthrie believes with Shaw that she was a splendid person. The Parolles episodes became a riot on the level of *The Army Game*. But the character of Helena and the charm of the Countess of Roussillon were exquisitely upheld by Zoe Caldwell and Dame Edith Evans.



To *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced by the newly appointed Director, Peter Hall, came Charles Laughton as Bottom. He was mildly amusing in an Elizabethan setting based on the fact that the play was written to grace a wedding in a nobleman's hall. The result was a challenge to the lovers of tradition but a comfort to those who favour an escape from it.

For *Coriolanus* came Sir Laurence Olivier with a magnificent performance of that mountain of military valour and imprudent pride. The production, another success for Peter Hall, had its unusually witty touches too. Dame Edith as Volumnia was finely the Roman matron, now haughty, now humbled, and Anthony Nicholls a notable Aufidius. Has any leading actor ever plunged to death with more breath-taking audacity than did Olivier in this piece?

Last came Charles Laughton's *King Lear*, disappointing in its early scenes because so lacking in the show and stature of regal authority, but immensely moving in the final scenes of ruin and the rambling mind. Glen Byam Shaw now leaves Stratford after eight years of splendid command. Authority could not have been handled with more courtesy as well as more professional skill. I.B.



Opposite: Edward de Souza and Zoe Caldwell in *All's Well that Ends Well*. Above: Charles Laughton in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Below: Edith Evans, Vanessa Redgrave and Mary Ure in *Coriolanus*. Photographs by Angus McBean.

DO WE NEED A NATIONAL THEATRE?

By ROBIN WHITWORTH

*Deputy Chairman of the British Drama League. Member of
the Joint Council of the National Theatre and Old Vic.*

THE National Theatre was first proposed in practical detail by William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker in 1904. Since then it has been given so much publicity that it is hard to believe that it still consists of only a single stone.

The present position is surprising. By the National Theatre Act of 1948 Parliament authorised the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide a million pounds for its building and equipment. A site on the South Bank adjoining the Festival Hall was provided by the London County Council. The site has since been moved to a better position adjoining County Hall with the approval of Her Majesty the Queen Mother, who laid the Foundation Stone in 1951. The plans have been approved by the Fine Arts Commission.

But still this theatre is not built, and there is much misunderstanding as to its desirability and purpose.

The Living Theatre Shrinks

Would it be wise to build another theatre, in view of the fact that since the war over a hundred theatres have closed? Why have so many theatres closed? There are two main reasons: The first is economic, and the second is the impact of counter-attractions.

The economic reason is two-fold. For a theatre to pay its way before the war it had to be full on Saturdays and half-full on the other nights of the week; now it must be three-quarters full on the other nights of the week. Most of our theatres were built during the last century on central sites which are now very valuable; greater profits can be obtained in rents from shops, offices and flats, and huge tax-free profits can be gained by speculators when leases run out.

Counter-attractions have developed enormously in the past ten years. At eight o'clock on an average evening nearly one million people are in dance halls, over two million people are in cinemas, about five million people are listening to the wireless and about twelve million are watching television. That accounts for twenty million people; about half the adult population.

Under the impact of these new forces the living theatre has shrunk by about 25 per cent. But in spite of this trend the best in the living theatre has survived and the British theatre

to-day is very much alive. And no one wants the living theatre to shrink—least of all the television authorities—for thoroughly practical reasons.

An amateur production of a play may cost £50. A production of the same play by a professional repertory company might cost £500. A production of the same play in the West End of London might cost £5,000. The overall cost of its production on television might be half as much again; but it might be seen by ten million people. An audience of that size would fill an average West End theatre for more than twenty-five years.

Here two points emerge. First, budding actors, actresses, playwrights, designers, and so on cannot practise their arts and crafts on television at the cost of several thousand pounds an hour, so television needs the living theatre as a training ground and as a source of talent and material. Secondly, drama is being propagated by radio and television at a greater rate, and is playing a bigger part in the life of this nation than ever before.

The Significance of Drama

Lovers of the living theatre may say that television is not the same thing as live presentation. That is true: but if we decide that drama matters, we should welcome its presentation in any medium.

Drama is important in so far as it reveals the truth about the relationships of human beings with one another and with the world at large. It should also be a continual reminder of the insufficiency, for intelligent men and women, of things as they are. Great drama, like all great art, relies for its creation upon truth. In so far as drama reveals truth, all forms of its propagation are to be welcomed, and its mainspring in the living theatre is important.

The living theatre can be charted in the shape of a triangle, with the amateur theatre (comprising hundreds of thousands of people achieving self-expression and gaining understanding of the experiences of others) as its base; with the professional theatre (comprising provincial repertory, tours and the West End of London) as its centre; but it is a triangle without an apex. It is the gap at the apex of the triangle that the National Theatre would fill.

What Sort of Theatre?

The National Theatre would be an exemplary theatre, presenting the best productions and performances that this country could provide. Its mandate would include the works of Shakespeare and other classical plays, the revival of whatever is vital in recent British drama, the presentation of new plays and the development of contemporary drama.

Let us not underestimate the value and vitality of the commercial theatre: but its efforts are inevitably scattered and subject to limiting circumstances. The work of the Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, for example, is concentrated in a particular field, and it is not in the metropolis. Stars who can earn several hundred pounds a week in the West End sometimes appear at the Old Vic for as little as £45 a week; but the Old Vic cannot always rely upon such appearances. No commercial management could keep productions in co-ordinated repertory in exemplary fashion on the scale envisaged.

No one is under the illusion that exemplary drama can be achieved by the mere provision of a building and money. Our National Theatre, like the *Comédie française* and all human institutions, would go through good and bad periods in the course of time. The difficulties in the way of achieving perfection should not deter us from providing the most favourable circumstances for its pursuit.

The problems of management and direction would indeed be crucial, but the pattern for the management of such an enterprise on behalf of the nation has been well established by the precedents of organisations such as the National Gallery, the Arts Council and the B.B.C.

Some Doubts and Misunderstandings

It is sometimes feared that state subsidy would hinder the free pursuit of good drama; but it is to be noted that such patronage is in accordance with the European tradition. In ancient Greece and medieval Britain the theatre was supported by the community. The pattern set by Louis XIV in establishing the *Comédie française* was in line with the patronage of the theatre by German princes, dukes and bishops, and was followed in Russia by Catherine the Great, who established a pattern of subsidisation that has survived the Russian revolution. In Britain it was not until 1843 that the Lord Chamberlain's licence became available to any reputable management. It is the idea of the commercial theatre rather than the idea of the subsidised theatre that is new. There is no reason why the National Theatre should be controlled by the Government any more than in the case of the Arts Council. The National Theatre should be State provided rather than State controlled.

There are sometimes questions about the possible impact of the National Theatre on the commercial theatre. At present the public

tends to follow stars. Would there be enough stars to go round? Of course the National Theatre should employ existing stars. It should also create stars of its own. The British theatre is remarkably rich in supporting players who do not at present rank as stars. The National Theatre would give them additional opportunities to the benefit of the theatre as a whole. And there is reason for believing that the attraction of stars is diminishing and that the public is becoming increasingly interested in the quality of the play.

It is sometimes asked whether a new building is necessary. Existing theatres have been fully considered, but none of them have been found suitable. For example, Drury Lane is too large, and the Haymarket is too small. No existing theatre is suitable for the presentation of plays in repertory on the scale and in the way envisaged.

It is sometimes contended that the National Theatre should not be housed in a building in London, and that any money available should be given to the support of the theatre in the provinces. This contention represents a confusion of thought. There is machinery for the support of the theatre in the provinces as a result of the implementation of part of the Civic Theatre Scheme, put forward by the British Drama League in 1942, by Section 132 of the Local Government Act of 1948. By this clause about eight million pounds was then potentially available to Local Authorities for the support of music, drama, cinema and other forms of entertainment. The provincial theatre is also supported by the Arts Council (even though the amount of money at its disposal is deplorably small). The National Theatre scheme is quite different. These two issues should not be confused. They are equally important but different paths in pursuit of the same purpose.

The National Theatre should have two companies, so that one could work in London while the other travelled in Britain and abroad. It was agreed in 1946 that the Old Vic should provide the nucleus of the National Theatre organisation, and that in the meantime the project should be pursued by a Joint Council of the National Theatre and Old Vic, but that there should be no blending of assets or funds until the building is erected. It is envisaged that when that time comes the Joint Council will give place to a newly constituted Board of Governors.

A Question of Value Judgment

The promoters of the National Theatre Scheme believe that Britain has made a greater contribution in the field of drama than any other country, and that our potential contribution to drama and the revelation of truth should be supported by the resources of the nation as a whole.

They believe that the establishment of a National Theatre would provide a stimulus

to the living theatre in its efforts to overcome its economic difficulties and to flourish appropriately in the face of the new counter-attraction. It should also, on a more material level, help our tourist trade by the raising of our cultural prestige. It is a question of value judgment. In what proportions should we devote our resources to education or roads, health, culture and defence?

The theatre has been well described as a 'factory of thought, a promotor of conscience and a temple of the ascent of man'.

The British Drama League believes that the National Theatre should and will be built.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,

I spent last Autumn touring England and parts of Scotland with a professional theatre company taking theatre to hamlets, towns and villages where they rarely see live theatre except for their own amateur dramatic companies. We met many people from those companies, both interested onlookers and supporters and eager participants, but one thing surprised me very much—their complacency.

Generally speaking, in the larger communities where the atmosphere was competitive, and maybe the standard higher, amateur companies came to see our play *en masse*, keen, enthusiastic and full of constructive criticism; but in the smaller places, where one company reigned in solitary contentment, its members wouldn't support our visit at all. I often heard it said 'Oh, they did the same play some time ago and think no one could better their performances.'

I was surprised at this because when I was an amateur we respected the professionals and welcomed any opportunity of going to see them. If we could learn something, however small—perhaps how to use and incorporate a prop into a speech, or how to sit down, or even just to open and close a door without awkwardness—then the evening had not been wasted. Now, as a professional, I admire amateurs—but good amateurs, those who go on determinedly working to improve.

Both amateurs and professionals want to present plays to the very best of their ability. One of the main differences between them is technique. Good amateurs have the emotion and the feeling, but professionals have spent years learning and then practising technique, which is the tool needed for conveying that same emotion the better to their audiences.

There is so very much for a professional to achieve that he must go on learning for years, so that, surely, if an amateur can watch him and graft even a fraction of that learning to his own knowledge, he will greatly enrich his own standard of performance.

I. LATIMER

London, S.W.

Dear Editor,

The trail of derelict theatres all over the country, and the wish to keep theatres in being against the time when audiences lose the television habit, have prompted us to try and start a new company at the Hippodrome, Aldershot. This is a proper theatre building and therefore more suitable for the presentation of plays than any converted hall could possibly be.

At the present time many good actors are leaving the theatre through lack of employment and being forced into work which neither develops their talents nor satisfies the urge which originally led them to the theatre. We believe that many people, especially the younger ones, are beginning to look for entertainment away from their own firesides. If there are no theatres left for them to visit, a new generation may lose the theatre-going habit entirely.

Because out-of-town theatre has been accepted, even by its supporters, as necessarily inferior in its standard of work to the West End, we plan to play ten days in every fortnight, allowing two days and a Sunday for technical and dress rehearsals. By this and other means it will be our aim to keep up a good standard of work, and by a careful planning of plays trust we can interest an audience of a wide range of ages and tastes.

We hope to get the venture started this autumn and look to all lovers of the theatre for their blessing and support.

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THEATRE BOOKSHELF

Shakespeare as Seen

Shakespeare and the Artist by W. Moelwyn Merchant. Oxford. £5 5s.

William Poel was a genius, and his sense of visual beauty was of the finest; yet not all of us were perfectly happy about his reconstruction of the Elizabethan stage. It was, we supposed, correct; but we found it a trifle joyless—it put Max Beerbohm in mind of owls; even the word Puritanical, if it occurred to us, was not easily dismissed. We turned, perhaps, to our boyhood's dream of an eternally sunlit Globe, all rough-hewn English oak and honest plaster, wherein the words were the only thing that mattered. But not for very long. For we knew that the Elizabethans were avid of continental fashions, and that in the arts they looked to Italy for guidance. Was it credible that the English theatre, nurtured and endowed by the Renaissance, should have held aloof from Baroque?

It was not. With our perception of the fact, away went our picture of a Globe in tasteful Farmhouse Tudor. But one does not willingly abandon an illusion until one has something more substantial to put in its place. Fortunately the new scholarship was equal to the occasion. The reconstructions became steadily gayer and more lordly, until the 'sumptuous' and 'gorgeous' of Puritan invective had some meaning. Nor was this the end of the matter. In such a setting, we had to discard the belief that the great charm of Elizabethan stagecraft was its lack of sophistication. Granville-Barker's *Prefaces* were of service here. But some eight years ago Mr. Bertram Joseph turned his attention to Elizabethan acting, and suggested convincingly enough that it was governed by the precise ordinances of rhetoric. And now comes Mr. Moelwyn Merchant, with an exhaustive study of the whole subject which leaves us in no doubt that Elizabethan staging was a very considerable manifestation of Baroque art.

The 'wit' that the Elizabethans set such store by was not necessarily concerned with fun, or even with verbal conceits. It stood, roughly, for the human faculty of making anything significant and of enhancing its significance by the association of ideas. Using the word in this ampler sense Mr. Merchant pronounces Baroque art essentially witty: there is wit, he says, in the carving and painting above the high altar at Steinhausen, and in the deliberate anti-climax of its culmination; the same quality, applied to music, inevitably evolved opera: Monteverdi's *Orfeo* appeared in the same year as *Antony and Cleopatra*. Reverting to Shakespeare, he persuades us—if we need persuasion—that that child of nature was as well up in the aesthetics of the day as he

was in law or seamanship, that he was keenly alive to visual effect, and that nothing could have been more to his liking than a conception whereby all the arts were seen as one, with idioms and methods that were interchangeable. The author's erudition is great, and his parallels are as daring as they are felicitous. The anti-climax at Steinhausen, when wit in the presence of the infinite has nothing more to say, can be matched with Desdemona's 'Faith, half asleep'—or, one might add, with Lear's button, or numberless master-strokes of the same kind. In terms that are entirely rational he evokes the most satisfying Globe we have yet had: a playhouse sure of itself, owing a good deal to its medieval ancestry and as yet unembarrassed by the claims of scenic realism, but already strong in scenic appeal; in short a perfected instrument for the kind of dramatic illusion it sought to impose, not only on the plain pittance but on an intelligentsia of cultivated and exacting taste.

This however is but a bare summary of Mr. Merchant's first chapter, his point of departure on a much wider enterprise. He sets out to record the changing fashions in which Shakespeare has been presented to the view from his own time to ours. But being himself possessed of 'wit' as well as knowledge, he also finds a significant pattern in the whole evolution which corresponds exactly to the evolution of our ideas about art in general. More, he makes it clear that through three centuries there was a continuing reciprocity between the studio and the stage. The neat little frontispieces to Shakespeare that began to appear in 1709 are, for the most part, decidedly theatrical, surely showing us what the draughtsman had seen from the pit. On the other hand Mr. Merchant traces the camp scene in *Coriolanus*, as Poussin conceived it, through Rowe's frontispiece of 1709 and Hanmer's of 1744 up to 1808, when Kemble staged it very much according to all three. But had Poussin seen it so, on the stage?

Romanticism was already at work in the studios when Garrick installed de Louthembourg as designer at Drury Lane. His landscape-rows, gauzes (developed from Inigo Jones's?) and ingenious lighting transformed scenic art; from serving as background and comment to the play it now became a sympathetic participator in the action; the classically minded Kemble could not resist the spirit of the age, and the way was open for the dioramas that Clarkson Stansfield painted for Macready and the settings of Charles Kean and Irving. But always the reciprocity went on. Charles Kean (to whom Mr. Merchant is refreshingly indulgent) gave more than adequate expression to the artistic notions of his day; Irving's conception of the grandiose and horrific was very much that of Gustave Doré, Godwin's

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spirit worked on him through Ellen Terry, and he eventually made his acknowledgment to the Pre-Raphaelites. We may note at the same time that Maclise's Play Scene is pure—shall we say?—Princess's, just as year after year at the Royal Academy there were paintings that were pure Lyceum.

With the cult of non-scenic Shakespeare, and our concurrent resolve to escape from the proscenium frame, our notions of visual effect took yet another turn. Granville-Barker inclined to the formalism and symmetry of the Baroque, but he and those of us who followed him are now out-moded. Without its frame, the picture as a whole seems to matter less, and it is the significant detail, anywhere and everywhere, that invites the eye and mind, with some help from selective spotlights. Here is something very different from the co-ordinated spectacle that the picture stage succeeded in presenting alike to the front row of the stalls and the side seats in the gallery. It suits admirably the painter or photographer who seeks to capture this or that moment of the play from the best possible angle, but it tempts the producer to cram his wood with far too many fascinating trees. He tends to become diffuse, to diminish great moments by intruding bright ideas. In the final section of his book Mr. Merchant draws together the threads of his theme by discussing in detail how six of Shakespeare's plays have fared in the hands of successive managers, painters and draughtsmen. One of them is *Henry VIII*, and he concentrates on the trial of Queen Katherine. I have always liked Harlow's rendering of that scene, with the Kemble family in action; it is as congested as a good plum cake, but the triangle of King, Queen and Cardinal is most dramatically contrived; this was done less dramatically, if more spaciouly, by Kean at the Princess's, dramatically and spaciouly by Irving at the Lyceum. Then follow Mr. Merchant's later examples: formidable brainwork here, and perhaps some concession to egalitarian doctrine, because the three persons who matter most do not engage the eye with their old authority: you can't see the wood for the trees.

This book makes one sigh for the great days of reviewing. It is expensive, but not more so than it deserves. It is a handsome volume, with upward of 240 illustrations, chosen with excellent judgment and faultlessly reproduced; I delight particularly in the Fuselis, the Blakes, in some of the much abused Boyds, in the resuscitation of William Cresswick's *Julius Caesar* and Godwin's *The Merchant of Venice*, in Romney's dashing sketches of Macbeth at the least happy supper in all dramatic literature, and a brilliant Sargent of Ellen Terry as that homicidal monarch's lady—not the one that we all know in the Tate, but a drawing which the National Portrait Gallery does not parade as it should. Add to these riches a text which is no mere commentary but a lively and searching

disquisition on aesthetics, and you will agree that *Shakespeare and the Artist* is well worth the price.

W. BRIDGES-ADAMS

One Method

Stanislavski's Legacy edited by E. R. Hapgood. Reinhardt. 16s.

'An actor is a teacher of beauty and truth' wrote Stanislavski in 1901, and never wavered from this belief throughout his life. It is a belief alien to the English-speaking theatre in which, until recent times, any management with a mission other than to give the public what it wants has been usually led to failure. Yet Stanislavski's influence on the modern generation of good English actors is great. No dramatic student would publicly admit to not having read *Building a Character* or *An Actor Prepares*, and in America, as we all know, the author of *My Life in Art* is given the sincerest form of flattery by Mr. Lee Strasberg and his followers.

Stanislavski's Legacy will explain why this is so to all who find it difficult going to seek out Stanislavski's wisdom from his long and somewhat wordy major works. It is a short book, and consists of selections of material left behind him on his death. The most valuable, from a professional point of view, is an article with which many have been familiar for two decades, though few realised the identity of the author. For it appeared, unsigned, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from the late twenties until a few years ago, and is called 'The Art of the Actor and the Director'. In it Stanislavski concisely explains the importance of director and actor, and how they set about their work.

Sometimes he seems to state only what all good actors know. Yet obvious or not, no one has expressed better the fundamentals of the actor's art. For example take the following passage on the speech of the actor:

Our everyday speech tends to be prosaic and monotonous. In trying to get away from this boring monotony actors sometimes ornament their speech, especially if they are reciting poetry. They resort to artificial vocal floweriness . . . which does nothing to convey the essential emotions of the role.

There does exist however another *natural, musical, resonant form of speech* which we note in great actors in moments of genuine artistic inspiration.

An actor must acquire this musical speech for himself by exercising his voice under the control of his sense of truth almost to the same degree as a singer does . . .

An actor, interpreting a part in terms of his own understanding of it will not forget that each sound which forms a word, each vowel as well as each consonant, is a *separate note* which takes its place in the tonal chord of a word: it expresses this or that small part of the soul of the character that filters through the word.

Stanislavski's views on the relative import-

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ance of the actor, author, director, and scenic artist make interesting reading. On the kind of stage designer who to-day in England is allowed so often to overpower Shakespeare, he says:

The work (of such a designer) excites the public and completely distorts the meaning of the play, *the creative point of departure for its production and its relationship to the spectators.*

The whole centre of gravity is altered. The public, the director of the play, and the actors themselves fall prey to the enchantment of the scene-designer, and in their blindness they accept the foolish ways in which the painter imposes on the playwright and his work, the actor and his art, indeed on the whole theatre.' (The italics are mine.)

Those of Stanislavski's disciples who think that the only way to the actor's truth is their own way should read this excellent book, if only because of this quotation from one of his notebooks, which demonstrates the author's humility and the absence of dogmatism of the true artist:

There is really no question of my method or your method. There is only one method, which is that of organic, creative nature . . . and I am willing to state in writing that if any student entering our theatre has anything to contribute which would help us to reach the laws of that nature, I should be only too happy to learn from him.

JOHN FERNALD

The Clothes They Wore

Handbook of English Costume in the 19th Century by C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington. Faber. 84s.

Dr. Willett Cunnington has always had a special interest in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it was on that century alone that he originally concentrated when amassing the vast collection that was eventually acquired by Manchester and is now the nucleus of the Gallery of Costume at Platt Hall. Since then, with Mrs. Cunnington's collaboration, he has made periodical excursions through the centuries from the Middle Ages onward, but with the publication of the present volume he is back on the ground that he has particularly made his own.

And a formidable volume it is! The word 'handbook' suggests something that can be easily carried in the pocket and produced for reference when required, but this new work puts a strain on the pocket in more senses than one, for it has over 600 pages, costs four guineas and weighs one pound twelve ounces in the kitchen scales. Much of this bulk is made up of solid, unquestionable information cited from contemporary fashion periodicals, advertisements and fiction. The authors have gone to work in the spirit of the early annalists, recording the changing forms of men's and women's clothing as traceable if not absolutely

year by year, at least decade by decade. It is (within its limits) a useful work of reference and, for the reader inclined to browse, a work of frequent entertainment likewise. One cannot readily forget a description of the young Disraeli in a black velvet coat, scarlet waistcoat and purple trousers braided with gold, or the joyous discovery that the familiar clerical waistcoat, on its introduction in the eighteenth century, was 'thought to savour of Popery', and was disrespectfully known in consequence by the initials M.B., as denoting the Mark of the Beast.

The second half, which deals with women's costume, has fewer fascinating surprises, as it necessarily follows lines already familiar to us from the author's earlier publications on the subject, but it cites an advertisement for an early nineteenth-century wig known as the Aphrodisian Scratch, and later on gives us the categorical statement that 'In 1889 the bustle collapsed almost abruptly', but does not tell us whose, and supplies no details of the episode. One or two rather downright statements might be the better, perhaps, for modification. The aigrette, for instance, was properly made from the feathers of the egret, or Lesser White Heron, not from those of the humming-bird as the text implies, and the smart Tribby hat has little to do with Tree's costume as the seedy and disreputable Svengali, but is understood to have been given its name when objects of all sorts were being brought out in their newest forms and called after the popular play of the moment. These are small points, it is true, but in a work which lays down the law so firmly and so frequently, accuracy is particularly desirable in small things as well as great.

Two other matters call for comment. In the first place, the scope of the book is rather more narrowly limited than its title implies, since it deals almost exclusively with the fashionable and would-be fashionable world, concentrating on what tailors' and dressmakers' advertisements announced that people ought to wear, rather than recording evidence of what they wore. There is practically no mention of the characteristic dress of the countryman, the factory worker or the artisan, though there is ample evidence in paintings, drawings and publications throughout the century, beginning with the fine series of colour-plates in Pyne's *Costume of Great Britain* and going on through the work of social writers like Mayhew and novelists like Dickens and Trollope. This was the great age of book-illustration, and the English illustrators by no means limited themselves to the fashion-plate world of urban and suburban society. Moreover, the high quality of their work gives a clear illustration not only of the clothes but of the way they were worn and the bearing and character of those who wore them, and brings us to our second point of criticism. The illustrations of the present work are redrawn from contemporary representations, often the work of nineteenth-

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century draughtsmen of high quality such as Dighton, Keene or du Maurier, but the copying has been done with insufficient skill to give an accurate representation of the garments themselves or of their effect in wear. Particularly welcome, therefore, is the list of references at the end, indicating where the originals may be found, and the reader will be well advised to consult those originals wherever possible, if he desires to see the precise degree of elegance that the nineteenth-century attempted—and achieved.

MARTIN HOLMES

The Elizabethan Stage

Shakespeare Survey. No. 12. C.U.P. 25s.

It is now the editorial policy of the annual Shakespeare Survey to concentrate on one topic. The disadvantage of this is an inevitable monotony: the gain lies in the assembling of all the best specialist knowledge on the chosen subject. The theme this year is the structure of the Elizabethan Theatre on which there is certainly no lack of volumes already. The first article, by George R. Kernodle, is called 'The Open Stage: Elizabethan or Existentialist?' The author does not stop to explain what he means by Existentialist, which has become one of the nuisance-words of our time. Properly, I believe, it is a theory of ethics of an egoistic and even anarchistic kind. To drag the term into discussion of the arts is usually done by those who do not know what they are talking about. A well-known 'progressive' director of plays recently told me that he intended an Existentialist production: when I asked him what he meant by that adjective, he could not tell me. I gathered from his mumblings that he thought Existentialism to be the same as Surrealism.

Much better is to come in this volume from W. P. Rothwell who, inquiring 'Was There a Typical Elizabethan Stage?' decides, with good reason, that there was no such thing. The players had to arrange their renderings of a play on the assumption that it would be acted in an open or a roofed theatre, at Court or in a nobleman's hall, and on any premises available during the rough passage of a tour. Obviously productive methods had to be flexible since there was no typical theatre. Of the London Tudor and Jacobean theatres, of which we have details, it is surely true that they were wooden buildings easily adjustable. A couple of carpenters could have added or removed features of the stage-architecture in a few hours. It is likely that a play which needed an inner stage could be given one and a play which needed more open space could be given that by closing or removing minor structural features. The actors, as Mr. Rothwell points out, were living in an age of change and experiment, and being themselves adventurers and continually trying new things, were unlikely to be tied down by any architectural tradition:

Why then, should one expect, before 1598, to find every public theatre equipped with a raised, roofed stage, and an 'inner stage' with gallery above, and a 'music room', any more than one would expect to find identical methods of production throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom?

In that case, much of what follows from other writers seems beside the point, but there is a useful contribution from Allardyce Nicoll in which it is argued that the actors must sometimes have used the yard around the stage for making certain kinds of entry.

To the additional subject, outside the architectural survey, Dr. Sisson brings some fascinating research into the families living at Shottery in Shakespeare's time, and Richard David has many sensible things to say about the relations of actors and scholars. He concludes with some admirable remarks on the duty of the audience who must mingle humility with acceptance and not be 'pettifoggingly on the watch for minutiae'. To the anti-theatrical view, so strongly put once by Logan Pearsall Smith, who believed that reading Shakespeare was always better than seeing him in the theatre, Mr. David replies with delightful cogency.

IVOR BROWN

New Light on Goethe

Goethe's Major Plays by Ronald Peacock. Manchester University Press. 21s.

It was a brilliant idea to pick out one aspect of Goethe's multiform poetic world and to concentrate on his achievements as a dramatist. Professor Peacock narrows his scope further by limiting his study to the major plays, ignoring the countless fragments, song-plays and court-masques with which Goethe's path is strewn. His survey centres on those works which constitute Goethe's main contribution to world drama.

This concentration enables us for the first time fully to assess the particular form of drama Goethe developed. This form falls into no known pattern of drama—it is unique both in its obvious deficiencies and in its intrinsic values. In contrast to all born dramatists (such as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen) Goethe created his drama not from a given set of characters or actions but from his innermost experience, symbolising his personal conflicts in opposing characters. His plays lack a central plot but consist of episodes building up into a whole; their dramatic unity is sustained by a dominating central figure who bears many of Goethe's own traits.

This pattern Professor Peacock traces through the sequence of plays reaching from the two 'historical' plays, *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont*, to the two 'classical' dramas, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Torquato Tasso*, and finally to *Faust*. Each of these works centres

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on a main character who is shown in conflict with the world—certain aspects of the world, political or social, in the earlier works: the whole of life in *Faust*. These characters, nourished with the poet's life-blood, all face a challenge which calls for a moral decision. The outcome is always a moral victory—even when the hero succumbs. Goethe's deep-rooted affirmation of life shunned any tragic solution: even in *Tasso*, the drama of poetic genius in mortal conflict with social convention, the outcome is not tragedy; the poet, as Professor Peacock carefully elaborates, is not destroyed, but the problem remains for ever unresolved. The same is true of the two slighter plays Professor Peacock deals with in this book, *Clavigo* and *Stella*; the tragic solution Goethe added to the latter as an afterthought was dictated by public taste, not by his own choice.

The whole sequence of plays culminates in *Faust*, which grew along with them from the beginning, and which gathers their single strands into an all-embracing whole. It can be argued whether it is possible to treat of *Faust I* while ignoring *Faust II*. However, Professor Peacock maintains that the Second Part, transcending as it does the confines of drama, would have unduly shifted the focus of his study. As it stands, he perfectly attains the aim he has set himself: to evaluate Goethe's achievements as a dramatist, independent of the vast body of his other writings. By thus confining himself to a single aspect, he sheds new light not only on Goethe but on the infinite potentialities of dramatic form. His study, rich in subtle observations and based on a profound knowledge of his subject, will be valuable both to the student of German literature and to the general reader interested in drama as an art-form.

H. F. GARTEN

Long Plays

Héloïse by James Forsyth. Heinemann. 7s. 6d. Time and the dramatists have dealt hardly with most of the great lovers of history. Héloïse and Abelard fare better in the hands of Mr. Forsyth. His simply-written, moving play brings the lovers to life in terms of outward and inner conflicts and creates vividly their pathetic story. It has met with great success in its off-Broadway production and should be read by groups with an eye on the future. (7 m., 2 f. 4 sets).

So Many Children by Gerald Savory. French. 6s. A far cry from the world of *George and Margaret* Mr. Savory's play, first produced under the title *Come Rain, Come Shine*, is set in a poor section of a North-country port. Agatha Thompson takes as lodgers odds and ends of humanity who have been in trouble with the police. The action of the play is concerned with her efforts to keep her house and ensure the future of her 'children'. Perhaps a sentimental theme, but unsentimentally written, with good acting material (5 m., 4 f. 1 composite set.)

The Dream House by Philip King and Falkland L. Cary. French. 5s. Described by its authors as a 'broad' comedy, this play is also set in the North. 'Broad' it is, and Ernie Biggs's struggles to reconcile life with his dreams provide the basis for a series of extraordinary misadventures. (4 m., 5 f. 2 sets.)

Cock-a-Doodle-Do by Wilson Barnes, with songs by Frank Stephenson. French. 5s. A dominating mother, the son of a Sheik, a beauty queen who loves cleaning and hates kissing, and a son with a talent for 'pop' numbers are just a few of the characters in this comedy. You can guess the others. (4 m., 5 f. 1 set.)

Pleasure or Pain in Education by Marion Jay. U. of London Press. 4s. A lively, well-written documentary, which traces the growth of education in England from medieval times to the present day, and ends with a plea for the future. This fascinating study would be interesting to see in action but, alas, its 'audience appeal' is necessarily limited by the status quo. (Cast, with doubling, about 12. Musical requirements, female choir, piano, harpsicord or spinet, if possible, or recorders).

In the Wilderness by Patricia Brooks. Leonard's Plays. 4s. The authoress has made a courageous attempt at tackling that most topical of problems—the colour bar. This makes the play of more worth than most of those written for all-women casts, though it is a pity that the problem is really shelved in the last act. (8 f. 1 set.)

The Builders by R. H. Ward. S.P.C.K. 5s. 6d. is a cleverly contrived and well-written religious play easily and effectively staged in hall or church. (4 m., 1 f. 1 set.)

Pray for a Wind by Moruenna R. Bielby. Epworth. 4s. A freely-written and entertaining life of John Wesley. (Minimum cast, with doubling, 4 m., 1 boy, 5 f. and extra voices as chorus. 1 set.)

DONALD FITZJOHN

Short Plays

Last Appearance by Miles Malleson. French. 2s. (4 m., 4 f. curtain set). Ingenious story of an old actress who forgets her lines, a hypnotist and an accident. There is a very strong part for an experienced actress.

Joseph Wants Five Sous by Helena Jones. French. 2s. Adapted from a story by Guy de Maupassant. (3 m., 1 boy, 4 f. Set, France, 1885). Uncle Jules who 'borrowed' from his family and left the country, is now supposed to be rich. Impoverished, they build their hopes on some restitution, but Joseph wants his uncle, not the money. Excellent part for the boy.

Green for Danger by Philip Johnson. French. 2s. (2 m., 3 f. cottage set). A neat little play in which a woman vindicates her sister's murder.

The Sharpest Press in Town by Neville Giffin. French. 2s. (2 m., 3 f.). A pleasant comedy about a Jewish girl's invitation to her first party, set in her parents' cleaning and pressing shop.

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Henry Hereafter by Hal D. Stewart. Evans. 1s. 9d. (2 m., 6 f. 1 set). In Entresol, a region between Heaven and Hell, Henry VIII and his six wives talk things over with Marmaduke, a Seraph, before Henry goes on to Heaven.

The Cinderella of Chulo by Alison Taylor. French. 2s. (11 m., 2 f. curtain set). A King sends a beautiful girl to beguile his enemy into neglecting his kingdom so that his own army may conquer it. China, 500 B.C.

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The Weird Sisters by Ronald Parr. French. 2s. (8 f. cottage set). No one has died or been born in Crumby Magna for seven years and then three extraordinary old ladies get 'the power' back and all is well.

The Valley of the Shadow by Joyce Pollard. Epworth. 9d. (5 f., 1 set.) Four women in prison in an enemy-occupied country await execution. Three of them talk of their 'crime'—sheltering escaped prisoners. A wardress tells them there has been a mistake and that only three are to be shot. Moving story with well-differentiated characters and a surprise ending.

Out of Bondage by Patrick B. Mace. Epworth. 2s. 6d. (3 m., 2 f. Set in a jungle). This interesting play in verse, about four survivors of an air crash, is a modern interpretation of the Fall of Man. Strong story with good dialogue. The rather weak end might be improved in production.

No Business Like It by John Bertram. French. 2s. (3 m., 5 f. Set in the back premises of fish and chip shop). Only when their eldest daughter, who is on the stage, pays them a surprise visit, do her parents realise (the father with consternation) that she is appearing in a 'nude' show.

Nightmare Chessboard by T. B. Morris. French. 2s. (9 f. Set in Palace of Westminster). The mandate for her arrest, signed by Henry VIII, falls into the hands of Katharine Parr. Based on a true incident.

Unpublished Incident by John Freeman. Leonard's Plays. 1s. 6d. (7 m., 6 f.) This modern morality play, dealing with the question of responsibility, was awarded first prize in the West Suffolk Festival. It is set in a busy street, but could be played in curtains.

Yellow Pieces (9 m., 1 f. 2 sets) and **The New Apprentice** (6 m., 2 f. 2 sets), both by Phyllis Bentley and adapted for Schools by R. S. Miles, are set in the West Riding in the eighteenth century. French. 2s. each. The first is an exciting

play, based on a true story, about tracking down coiners. In the second, the new apprentice prevents thieves from stealing his master's cloth.

Master Luck and Mr. Punch at Home by Wilfred Harvey, with production notes by Caryl Jenner. *English Children's Theatre*. 2s. each. In the first of these plays, which is based on a fairy story by Grimm, the son of a poor man weds the King's daughter after many vicissitudes. 18 characters, or 7 with doubling. The second shows a domesticated Punch and Judy with their daughter, dog Toby and Joey the Clown. These are the first two plays in an admirable new series for children.

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Plays in One Act by M. S. Armstrong, Edwards and Shaw, Sydney. 10s. (English Rights, Samuel French). *Drought* (1 m., 1 f.) A powerful story of the great Australian drought of 1902, requiring experienced actors. *Thomas* (2 m., 3 f.) A rather sad little comedy of two elderly sisters who look forward to making a home for their nephew. They are taken aback when he turns up, changed for the worse, with a wife. *Penny Dreadful* (2 m., 4f.) Was the doctor's first wife murdered? A sinister play in which suspense is maintained to the end.

New Plays Quarterly No. 45. Ed. John Bourns. Querkett £1 p.a. Plays available separately. One-Act plays: *The Birds Sang On* by Max Rayner. (2 m., 3 f.) A drama of violence behind the Iron Curtain. *Penny Wise* by Victor Lucas (6 f.) A woman, supposed to have been jilted, says good-bye to her fellow lodgers before setting out to see the world. *Mid-Autumn Madness* by Patricia Gordon. (2 m., 4 f.) Comedy in which a middle-aged, middle-class bachelor does not marry his barmaid fiancée. Three-act play: *Invitation to Reform* by Herbert Montague Jackson. (4 m., 6 f.) Clever comedy in which four people who have served prison sentences are invited to join a house-party, without their pasts being disclosed, so that they may be encouraged to return to respectability.

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COLCHESTER Repertory Company. *Not Enough Tragedy* by Val Gielgud. 5 m., 2 f. Interior set. Age v. Youth. *All Ends Up* by Richard Wilding. 5 m., 4 f. Farcical kitchen comedy.

COVENTRY Belgrade Theatre. *Break-out* by Bill Owen. 3 m., 2 f. Comedy of a convict on the run. *Dispersal* by A. L. Pattison. 13 m., 5 f. Set on R.A.F. Bomber Station during last war. *Bridge of Sighs* by Thomas Muschamp. 5 m., 2 f. Set, bridge on a frontier.

FARNHAM Repertory Company. *Strange Hands at Table* by Dudley Stevens. 5 m., 2 f. 1 set. Mystery play. *A Feather in his Cap* by Joan Morgan. 5 m., 4 f. Set, cottage in Belgravia.

GLASGOW Citizens Theatre. *The Roving Boy* by Joe Corrie. 9 m., 6 f. 2 sets. Dialect play on the life of Robert Burns.

GUILDFORD Repertory Company. *Good-bye World* by Bernard Kops. 4 m., 3 f. A youth escapes from prison to visit the scene of his mother's suicide. *Members Only* by G. C. Chambers. 5 m., 1 f. Set in drawing room of Stately Home. *This Other Eden* by Richard Dellar. 3 m., 3 f. Set, headmaster's room in 'co-ed' school. *Two's a Crowd* by Edward Kelsey. 6 m., 4 f. Farce.

HARROGATE Opera House. *Edge of the Night* by Harrison Owen. 7 m., 5 f. Waiting for the world to end. *The Hermit* by Philip King and Robin Maugham. 4 m., 2 f. Set on a mountain in Lebanon.

LINCOLN Theatre Royal. *The Devil's Mushroom* by K. V. Moore. 5 m., 2 f. Satirical comedy on the H-bomb.

OXFORD Playhouse. *The Green Years* by Claude-André Puget (trans. E. O. Marsh). 3 m., 4 f. English première of story of young love.

RICHMOND Repertory Co. *Condemned to Live* by Philip Weathers. 4 m., 4 f.

SALISBURY Arts Theatre. *Out of Thin Air* by Derek Benfield. 4 m., 2 f. Ancient manor house and the 'little people'.

WINDSOR Theatre Royal. *The Garden of Adonis* by Peter Watling. 2 m., 6 f. *House Without Windows* by Richard Reich. 3 m., 4 f.

WORTHING Connaught Theatre. *So Many Children* by Gerald Savory. 5 m., 4 f. *Who's Your Father?* by Dennis Cannan. 5 m., 5 f. *Farewell Yesterday* by Ted Willis. 4 m., 6 f. Drama based on novel by Rosemary Timperley.

YORK Citizens Theatre. *Man for the Job* by Dennis Driscoll. 3 m., 4 f. 1 set. Northern comedy. *The Fifth Season* by Sylvia Regan. 6 m., 7 f. Set, office-cum-models' dressing room, New York.

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THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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BRIEF CHRONICLES

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of the League will be held in London on October 1st-3rd at Birkbeck College, Malet Street, W.C.1. Owing to the delay in issuing the Autumn number of *Drama*, caused by the dispute in the printing industry, the programme of the Conference which would normally be issued with this copy of *Brief Chronicles*, has been sent direct to the Membership. This method of despatch has been unavoidably and unfortunately expensive. It is hoped however that as many members as possible will attend. All affiliated groups and societies are entitled to send two voting delegates, but in addition *all* members of such groups are cordially invited to come to the Conference.

The Conference Programme begins on Thursday evening, October 1st, with a visit to the Questors Theatre at Ealing to see William Saroyan's play, the *Cave Dwellers*, the first production of this play to be seen in England. After the play there will be a Wine and Cheese Party at the Theatre, at which delegates will be able to meet members of the Questors. Mr. Ivor Brown, Chairman of the Council will introduce the Conference the following morning (Friday) in the Harkness Hall, Birkbeck College. After his opening address, members and delegates will have the choice of attending any one of three special study groups which will discuss respectively, "The Festival," "Youth in the Theatre," and "the League in the Provinces."

On Saturday morning, October 3rd, there will be an Open Forum in the Harkness Hall on "Aspects of the National Theatre". The Secretary-General of the Arts Council, Sir William Emrys Williams, will take the Chair, and among the platform of speakers will be Richard Findlater, Anthony Quayle and Benn Levy. Those aspects of the National Theatre which will be particularly discussed are "Responsibility" (including management and finance), "the Repertory and Play Policy" of the Theatre and "The Provincial Picture". On Saturday evening a visit has been arranged to the Queen's Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, to see Sir Michael Redgrave in his own adaptation of *The Aspern Papers* by Henry James.

Life begins at forty

The birthday party is over. Officially it was a luncheon held at the Cafe Royal on June 10 to celebrate the twin occasions of the founding of the League and the first issue of *Drama* forty years ago, but it was a party in the best and festive sense of the word. The 200 guests were representative of all aspects of the theatre—actors and actresses, amateur and professional, directors and playwrights, managers and critics, members of theatrical organisations and playgoers. Lord Esher presided and spoke of the work the League had done since its inception especially in the cause of the National Theatre. He suggested that high priority in the Arts Council Report made the prospect of a National Theatre much more hopeful and if the Government intended to take a share of commercial television's profits, then some of this should in fairness go to the National Theatre and to establishing a chain of Repertory Theatres. He commented how strange it was that Drama, the art in which the English most excel, should be the one they most neglect. Robin Whitworth, Deputy Chairman of the League's Council and son of the Founder, the late Geoffrey Whitworth, paid warm tribute to Lord Esher whom he described as a champion of lost causes—admirable causes which must, it would appear, be lost because they are non-profit-making and cultural. He emphasised that the League had been founded to assist in the development of the art of the theatre and to promote a right relation between drama and the life of the community. Those were its ideals in 1919 and were still its policy to-day. Ivor Brown, Chairman of the Council, and editor of *Drama*, described, in the course of a speech which dealt with the state of the Theatre in general, the scope of the League's work and its facilities, and emphasised that it exists to serve equally both the professional and the amateur theatre. He paid a glowing tribute to the principal guest, Felix Aylmer, President of Actor's Equity. Speaking on behalf of the guests, Mr. Aylmer admitted that the professional did occasionally look askance at the amateur but he recognised the League as a stimulant and guide to the professional, and extremely valuable to him in building an informed and educated audience which in turn reacted upon the standard of professional acting.

Notable among the 200 guests were: Mr. John Allen, Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Mr. and Mrs. Felix Aylmer, Mr. Michael Barry, Miss Frances Briggs, Mr. and Mrs. Ivor Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Carpenter, Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndike, Mr. A. V. Cookman, Mr. W. A. Darlington, Mr. Alan Dent, Lord and Lady Esher, Mr. and Mrs. John Fernald, Sir Fordham Flower, Sir Barry Jackson, Mr. Nigel Gosling, Mr. George Haynes, Mr. Lionel Hale, Mr. Arnold Haskell,

Mr. H. V. Hodson, Mr. Martin Holmes, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Lambert, Mr. and Mrs. James Laver, Mr. Norman Marshall, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne, Mr. Stephen Mitchell, Sir Richard Powell, Mr. Alan Pryce-Jones, Mr. Kenneth Rae, Mr. Harold Rubinstein, Professor T. H. Searls, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Speaight, Mr. Frank Swinnerton, Sir Charles Tennyson, Mr. Stephen Thomas, Miss Gwyneth Thurburn, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. West, Rev. Austen Williams, Sir William Emrys Williams, Sir Donald and Lady Wolfitt, Mr. T. C. Worsley, Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. and Mrs. Robin Whitworth.

Each guest was given a copy of the League's commemorative booklet "The British Drama League 1919-1959," published that day, and an interesting feature of the Luncheon was that a full list of the guests present was printed alphabetically on the menu. Altogether a successful, enjoyable and distinguished occasion.

The British Drama League 1919-1959

The following review of the commemorative booklet, published on June 10th, appeared in the *Yorkshire Post* on June 17th and is reprinted by permission of the Editor, Sir Linton Andrews. This summary of the essence of the booklet and of everything the League has stood for since its inception could hardly be bettered.

Leader of the Theatre—by Desmond Pratt

To celebrate its 40th birthday the British Drama League has issued, at 2s. 6d., a small booklet, "The British Drama League, 1919-1959," which outlines briefly the work it has accomplished for the theatre since its formation. The League was founded by the late Geoffrey Whitworth "to assist the development of the art of the theatre and to promote a right relation between drama and the life of the community."

As Viscount Esher, president of the League, points out in his foreword to the history, these ideals have been the inspiration behind everything the League has done during the past 40 years.

There is no doubt that, by its guidance and its knowledge, it has influenced the development of the art of the theatre, both in Great Britain and the Commonwealth. This is particularly true of amateur dramatic societies. Many would have withered and died had they not been nurtured by the League.

It has been a true leader. Where advice has been needed, it has been forthcoming speedily,

where help has been required, there has been no lack of generosity, and in its arrangements of national festivals both competitive and non-competitive, the League has provided a marshalling yard for the many talents of the amateur theatre. It has given encouragement where it was deserved and criticism where it was necessary. It has observed the changing patterns in acting, production, decor, playwriting and architecture in the British Theatre, and adapted these patterns.

It has stimulated enthusiasm for the theatre in young people, helped always by the enlightened outlook of many education authorities.

The League is determined that this enthusiasm must be further cultivated and not allowed to drop into neglect.

If the soil is fertile, the League will water it and tend it until a stout theatrical tree stands as firm as those in Shakespeare's Arden. Because it is a voluntary organisation the League can well do with the support of all those concerned for the future of the British theatre.

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The considerable amount of money involved in these Awards may not, however, be generally realised. In 1957 and 1958, the Awards totalled about £1,500, and this year the sum is likely to be even higher. The Nescafe Awards have made an enormous difference to the teams taking part in the Festival and are a concrete example of the way in which Industry can, and does, help the theatre.

This year, however, Messrs. Nestle Ltd. have added to their generosity by meeting the cost of printing the booklet reviewed above, and the League is thus doubly indebted to them. Thank you.

The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the British Drama League will be held this year at 5.30 p.m. on December 30 at No. 10 Fitzroy

Square, London W.1. The Agenda will include the Statutory business required to be transacted at such meetings, viz.:

To pass the Minutes of the Meeting held on November 21st, 1958.

To receive the Annual Report and Accounts.

To appoint the Auditors for the ensuing year.

To transact any other business notified in accordance with the Articles of Association.

This is a preliminary announcement concerning the meeting and the official notice, the Agenda, and the Annual Report and Accounts will be posted to the Membership on December 1st under cover of the winter issue of *Drama*.

All Members of the League who are able to attend the Annual General Meeting, especially those who live or have their business in London and who are thus more easily able to attend, are asked to make every effort to come to the Meeting. It is hoped that as in previous years Lord Esher will be in the Chair.

"E" Division A.G.M.

League members in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and the City of Oxford are asked to note that the Annual General Meeting of "E" Division will take place on Saturday, October 24th at 3.15 p.m. at Hadow House, 20 Beaumont Street, Oxford. It is hoped that many members will be able to attend. Communications, please, to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. D. Marshall, The Malt House, Nettlebed, Nr. Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

"C" Division A.G.M.

Members and representatives of affiliated societies in Kent, Surrey and Sussex (C Division of the Eastern Area) are notified that their Annual General Meeting will be held at the Greyhound Hotel, Croydon, on Wednesday, 4th November, at 8.00 p.m.

Theatre International

On June 12th, forty-two delegates from eighteen countries met together at Pesaro, on the Adriatic coast of Italy, to discuss the affairs and problems of the amateur theatre in their various lands. The occasion was the Fourth Congress of the International Amateur Theatre Association, of which Mr. Martin Browne was the founder president. Pesaro is a charming little town, the birthplace of Rossini, about

halfway between Rimini and Ancona. It has a wonderful bathing beach, several very modern and comfortable hotels, a charming "old town" centred on the Piazza di Popolo, and a beautiful theatre, the Rossini, named after the composer, its most distinguished son. The arrangements for the comfort and entertainment of the delegates laid on by the town, as well as the organisation of the Congress itself, were highly efficient. The Congress discussions were conducted in three languages, Italian, French and English, through the medium of a team of six attractive girl interpreters.

After an official welcome in the Town Hall by the Mayor of Pesaro, the General Assembly of the Congress began in the Salon de la Republique of the Rossini Theatre. The first day's agenda was mainly concerned with business matters affecting the Association and its constitution. The second day was the occasion for two discussions on matters vitally concerning the Amateur Theatre. The first was "The Amateur Theatre as a Testing Ground for New Authors", introduced by Signor de Stefani, a playwright and translator. He was followed by M. Paul Blanchart of Paris whose impassioned address must have given the translating team some nervous moments. Both speakers emphasised the prime difficulty embodied in the title of the debate—a difficulty which is evidently international for we know it only too well in England. This is the double problem of authors being reluctant to entrust a new work to amateurs, who in turn are reluctant to experiment anyway with untried plays or playwrights. It is possible that England suffers less than some other countries from this problem. There are many societies, large and small, in Great Britain which actively encourage new playwrights with production opportunities—the original play competitions in the National Festival alone this year attracted 13 one-act and 7 full-length plays. Similarly, there are playwrights—established and new—who are not afraid to entrust their work to a good amateur group. There is considerable room for improvement, true, but the instances quoted by the English delegates (Peter Carpenter and Alfred Emmet) illustrating this co-operation between author and amateur in Great Britain suggested a leadership in this field which the other countries present were invited to follow.

The second debate was introduced in an excellent address by Alfred Emmet, representing the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain, on "The influence on the Amateur Theatre of new tendencies in the professional theatre." Mr. Emmet began by defining the Amateur Theatre, within the context of his subject, as the serious amateur theatre such as, for example, is represented in the Little Theatre Guild, where the member societies have achieved their own theatre premises and seek for originality, experiment and a "forward

look" in their choice of play and their styles of production and presentation. It was of this section of the amateur theatre that Mr. Emmet chose to speak as being "most likely to be influenced by the *avant garde* in the professional theatre—if any professional *avant garde* is to be found! They are less likely to be influenced by the ordinary level of professional work." He went on to discuss the influence of new writing particularly the American school—positive, violent, tough and sentimental—and the opposite French school (particularly Ionesco and Beckett)—the negative, antitheatre. His main point here was that the impact of new writing tends to influence presentation and production and is therefore a primary force. He regretted the lack of form and style in the modern English theatre, both in playwrights and actors. The conditions in the amateur theatre, i.e. a regular company, a permanent director, and a positive play policy, help to offset this formlessness, in the way that he thought similar conditions in the permanent European theatre companies helped to steady the professional theatre there. He described "method" acting and suggested that the amateur theatre tended to be influenced by the worst characteristics, i.e. the slovenliness, of this style, which in fact was quite contrary to the teachings of Stanislavsky from whom it was said to be derived. In fact, it was a case of "little knowledge being dangerous". Mr. Emmet also discussed influences in production styles, in decor and presentation and in theatre architecture, but space in *Brief Chronicles* is too limited to describe these as they deserve. The paper was received with great applause but not a great deal of discussion and one was left with the feeling that, whatever may be the case in their professional theatre, the amateur



Rossini Theatre, Pesaro

theatre in Europe lagged some way behind the *avant garde* of the British amateur theatre.

The Congress concluded the following day with a summing up of the discussions, the passing of a number of resolutions and an announcement of the preliminary plans for the 1961 Congress which will be held in Monaco. One interesting feature of the Congress arrangements at Pesaro had been the nightly visits to the Rossini Theatre where delegates saw plays entered for the Italian amateur theatre festival which began with the Congress and continued for three weeks. Apart from the official business of the Assembly a valuable feature of the Congress was the opportunity for meeting people concerned with the amateur theatre in so many different countries, and contacts were made which are certain to have a useful effect in the future.

Shakespeare in Australia

Until a generation ago Shakespeare's plays held their place on the Australian stage as good theatrical fare, providing a vehicle for actor-managers. Allan Wilkie, the last of them, with no theatre of his own, toured the Continent from 1915 onwards, and presented 25, in 1,200 consecutive performances, before he retired. Then ensued a period when Australian school-children, for whom the English syllabus prescribed two "set plays" for detailed textual study, supplied the main audience-potential, and the production of these plays was left to amateur Little Theatres.

The tour of the Old Vic in 1948 triggered off a Shakespearian revival in the professional theatre, with companies first visiting and now all-Australian. Last year the Elizabethan Theatre Trust launched the Young Elizabethan Players, a small touring company to take specially condensed versions of Shakespearian classics to the schools themselves! This year they opened in Victoria and are now on tour in N.S.W., with Queensland and South Australia to follow. The newly-formed Trust Co., presenting a monthly change programme of five plays at the Elizabethan Theatre, has ended its Sydney run with *Julius Caesar*, produced by Hugh Hunt. The J. C. Williamson Shakespeare Co. has opened in Melbourne with a repertoire of *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *King Lear*. It will go on to Adelaide and Perth, and eventually to the other State capitals. The company is headed by John Alden, who in 1948 on the Allan Wilkie model, began to present Shakespearian plays in Sydney and in the Jubilee Year, 1951, toured the Commonwealth.

Among Little Theatres with a good Shakespearian record *Twelfth Night* at Brisbane is

outstanding; it now has a model Elizabethan stage, on which it performed *King Lear* in 1958 and has recently presented *The Tempest*. These annual productions of Shakespeare are theatre for its own sake. In Sydney the Genesians have just finished a run of *Julius Caesar* in modern dress. The Canberra Repertory has put on *Measure for Measure*.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission, which has long included Shakespeare in its radio repertoire, has given television premieres of *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Universities too are making their contribution. The University of New England has staged *Twelfth Night*, Adelaide University Footlights Club *Hamlet*, and St. George's College in Perth *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the ninth annual Festival of Drama at Sydney University, St. Paul's Mummers are essaying an Australian premiere for *Troilus and Cressida*.

E. M. TILDESLEY

Three Interesting Productions

1. Endgame

**A Production Note for a Series of Performances at Manchester University
June 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th**

A single reading of *Endgame* suggests a mood of spiritual deprivation. There are many oblique references and direct observations which point to a theme. Some of these the producer will fasten on, and what might form an epigraph on his copy are Nell's words "I grant you there is nothing so funny as unhappiness . . . but its like the funny story we have heard too often . . . we don't laugh any more." The pathos and tragic farce in *Endgame* is clear.

The play's musical and poetic qualities demand frequent readings with tape-recorder interspersed with discussion.

Phrases are passed from one character to another like the theme and variations played out by a musical ensemble.

Although the characters are aspects of broken Humanity they are recognisable as theatrical types. Hamm the autocrat, Clov the half-wit zany, Nagg and Nell the pantaloons and the hag, make up a foursome whose particular modifications will grow on the actor during rehearsal.

Clov the only one able to walk is responsible for much of the play's business and movement. Fetching and carrying, scrambling up and

down the ladder, the agonised twists of his body, all suggest a tragic solo dance.

Briefly then the producer and his actors will discover what key lines make up a working hypothesis of theme, emotion, and characterisation. They will decide on the shape of the play and where its climax occurs, where the complex of speech and movement quickens its rhythm, where it slows down to a dying fall. He will give realisation to its style in speech and movement.

DENNIS HARRISON

2. The Hole

The Y.M.C.A. Players of Hereford won the John Maude Trophy in this year's Festival with *The Hole* by N. F. Simpson. They represented England at the British Final Festival in Glasgow on July 4th, and, although they did not win the Howard de Walden Trophy, their excellent production of this difficult and curious play won high praise from the adjudicator (Andre van Gysegem) and the audience. These notes on the play are reprinted from the Hereford programme by permission of the writer, Mr. E. R. Wood.

"People found this play difficult to understand at first. But once you have grasped that there is no plot and no coherent argument—that the amusing bit about queues, for instance, or the meeting of old friends who want to examine drains, have nothing to do with the hole and what people see in it—you can enjoy yourself without puzzling. On second hearing, the audience obviously liked it.

"There is nothing strange about the people in it. Those women, talking about their husbands in pseudo-psychological jargon, are in most Hereford bus-queues. Everybody is 'mal-adjusted' nowadays. Sid longs to be identical with somebody: Ben wants to be different. Ben's claustrophobia makes him want his ribs out of the way to give him breathing space: Sid gets his claustrophobia in the open air. These are real enough people, though we see only a bit of them, comically exaggerated.

"The three men talk games like prep-school boys. Englishmen do. (Our Field-Marshal's write of mass-bloodshed in terms of cricket!) They instinctively combine against anyone who is out of step. They think they are reasonable, but when they hunt in a pack they are an ugly sight, shouting for the rope, the lash, the hulks. The women join in, but on a more practical plane—they know that in prison emptying your slops looms larger than abstract principles. They have no use, of course, for the idealist, so lost in his dream that he hardly notices them. Only the workman sees things as they are.

"The dialogue is gaily sprinkled with Goon-Show nonsense, as when Endo asks for a fork and Cerebro surprisingly produces one from his pocket, but the dream-atmosphere turns to nightmare when the fork becomes a blood-stained knife. There is nothing difficult in this. Harmless things do suddenly turn dangerous, in walking as well as in dreams. People do work themselves up to alarming explosions; then as the smoke clears they have to find noble phrases ('nothing in his slops became him like the emptying of them') to talk themselves out. You can provide your own examples from recent history.

"The incoherence is intentional. The play's quality would evaporate in a traditional framework, with a clear pattern and a set of rounded characters. It is perhaps equivalent to abstract painting. But the standard is a bit uneven; some passages get nowhere. Other, like Cerebro's intellectual waffling in which he postulates the existence of a fourth cable, or Soma's preaching on Generating Sunday, are delightful satire and very successful stage stuff.

"We are told that the dialogue was hard to learn. But the actors need not worry: if they leave out a few pages here and there, nobody need know but the prompter. This would once have been thought a weakness in a play. Since the success of *Waiting for Godot* it doesn't seem to matter. It seems a pity, though, if construction and coherence no longer count in the theatre."

E. R. WOOD

3. A Bird in the Hand

A one-act comic opera *Two in the Bush* with libretto by D. J. Roberts and music by Peter Wishart received its first performance at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, on June 23rd, 1959.

The joke of the libretto is simple enough. The heroine tries to pass off her two lovers to one another as her uncle and brother respectively and the deception holds long enough to allow some robust fun.

Mr. Wishart's sparkling and spicily dissonant-diatonic music fits the action perfectly while allowing for some well shaped and at times melodious singing lines.

The piece was acted and sung with great skill and assurance by Rhianon Jones, David Holman and Bruce Critchinson with Anthony Ford at the piano and production by Brian Trowell.

WILLIAM DUNN

Junior Drama League

The Junior Drama League continues to increase its membership and a flourishing group at Morpeth, Northumberland, is running under the direction of a Junior Drama League member. Newcastle on Tyne and Edinburgh each have their own programmes for local members and other J.D.L. members are busy planning to arouse interest in their own districts. The Junior Summer School was most successful. Their newly elected patron, Tony Britton, sent a most encouraging and inspiring letter to them at the course which when read aloud to the members aroused great enthusiasm. Here is an extract from one of the reports written by J.D.L. members:

"This year the J.D.L. Summer Course was held at King Alfred's College, Winchester. The college is situated outside the town and is spaciouly set out in lovely grounds and surroundings. We arrived there on Tuesday, August 4th, and when we had settled in and had dinner we assembled in the Main Hall for the opening meeting and the auditions. Four plays were tackled on the course:

Daniel by Vachell Lindsay, rehearsed by Miss Mackenzie.

Take Two from One by Sierra, rehearsed by Miss Oxenford.

This Way to the Tomb by Ronald Duncan, rehearsed by Mrs. Ottaway.

Exercise Conflict by Donald Fitzjohn, rehearsed by the author.

"The weather was on our side and many rehearsals took place in the open. We were very fortunate in having some excellent lectures; these included lectures on Acting by Miss Fabia Drake and Mr. Ayrton, Stage Management by Mr. Lucas, Decor by Mr. Squire and Improvisation by Mr. Ronald James, as well as classes in make-up, Shakespeare, Stage movement, lighting, speech, workshop sessions; in fact most aspects of the Theatre. The senior course started towards the end of our's and on the Sunday night we performed the plays to them. It is very difficult even under the best circumstances to rehearse a play in five days and one of the important points raised when we were all having an informal chat with Mr. Carpenter was the possibility of extending the Course next year. Anyhow the plays were a great success, even though I say it myself. We covered a great deal of ground on the course and everyone certainly had a good time. As I am a new member of the J.D.L. this was my first course and I must say how much I enjoyed it and benefited by it. I shall not hesitate to sign on for the

future courses. I am sure I express everyone's feelings when I convey my deepest thanks to all those who helped in the planning and running of this most successful course."

The London Summer Programme held at Fitzroy Square had particular interest. Miss Freda Collins, the well-known playwright, gave a session on religious play-making. Her method fascinated members as she divided them into six groups with the subject of martyrdom and after half an hour's work, the groups came back with the written scenario of a play and one scene was acted out to show the style of the play. Miss Rosemary Brinton Butler, former drama adviser to the National Association of Mixed Clubs and Girl's Clubs, introduced a completely new subject—dance drama. The members again showed their ingenuity by arranging and inventing their own dance dramas to appropriate music. The drama quiz was more ambitious than usual as it covered questions on plays, playwrights, players, and theatre history dived into the periods Medieval, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Georgian, Victorian and Modern. The Exchange Session produced interesting plans for the Christmas programme and members have decided to compile their own list of suitable plays for this particular age group based on the suggestions from the experience of members. It was also decided to have another play-writing competition as the last one was so successful, one of the plays being presented on January 1st in the J.D.L. television programme. The lecture on Theatre Abroad aroused unexpected interest and they have planned for another one on this subject.

LYN OXENFORD

In Training

The Summer Drama Schools have once again proved a magnet attracting students from all parts of Great Britain and many foreign countries. There have been three schools this year, two at King Alfred's College, Winchester, and one at the North Riding Training College, Scarborough. The Junior School at Winchester is described elsewhere in this issue. The adult school there overlapped it, and provided 70 students with a busy and eventful 10 days. In addition to lectures, classes and visits, the students rehearsed four short plays or extracts which they presented to an invited audience on the last night of the Course. The plays were Obey's *Lucrece*, Giradoux's *The Enchanted*, Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, and *Mistress Bottom's Dream*, a new play by Marion Jay and Alison Graham-Campbell. Some of the students came from very far afield. There were six teachers from a mission school in Ghana, a woman doctor from Mexico City and British Council scholars from Singapore, British Honduras and Kuwait. The

staff at the school included Norman Ayrton, June Ottaway, Kristin Linklater, Geoffrey Squire, Nancy Glenister, Joseph Lucas, and from the Training Department, Frances Mackenzie, and Donald Fitzjohn.

A private swimming pool was one of the many amenities at the North Riding Training College where this year's second adult school was held. The College is extremely well appointed and beautifully situated on the South Cliff about one mile from the centre of Scarborough and overlooking the sea. Stephen Joseph was Guest Producer, taking as his play *The Deluge* which he rehearsed in the round. During the school the students visited Mr. Joseph's own "Theatre in the Round" at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, a new secondary modern school with a magnificently equipped stage, and a performance of three one-act plays which members of the Scarborough Theatre Guild are taking to Germany. Dr. Julia Baker of Mexico City (who had attended the Winchester School), Miss Carlotta Croal of British Guiana, PFC John Packard of the U.S. Army in Germany, Miss Maud Sandwall of Sweden, and Mr. Lal Chugh of New Delhi, were among the students. The popularity of the B.D.L. summer schools is indicated by the regularity with which quite a number of the students attend them. At Scarborough for example, there were many students particularly from Ireland and the North of England who meet regularly at B.D.L. schools and seem to manage both to work hard and have an enjoyable holiday at the same time.

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